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THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

A JOURNAL FOR THE LIBERAL IMAGINATION



WILL CLASS TRUMP GENDER?

The New Assault
on Feminism

by Wendy Kaminer

Can Liberalism Survive Clinton? Robert Kuttner
Social Security Hysteria Robert Ball, Ted Marmor, & Jerry Mashaw
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Liberty, Community, and the National Idea Alan Brinkley



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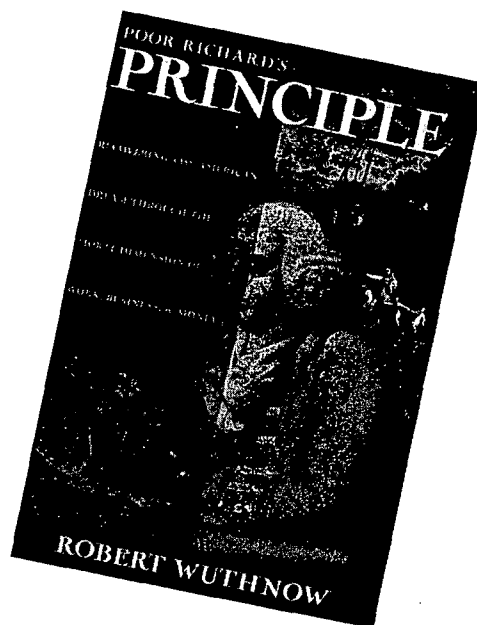
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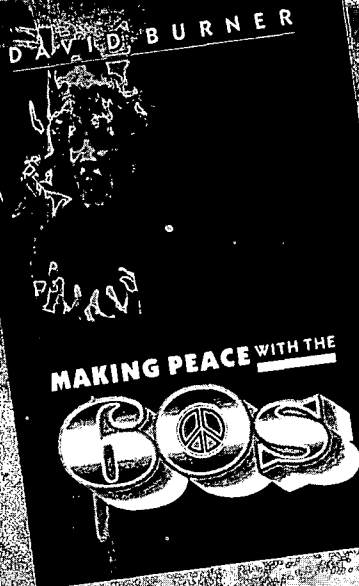
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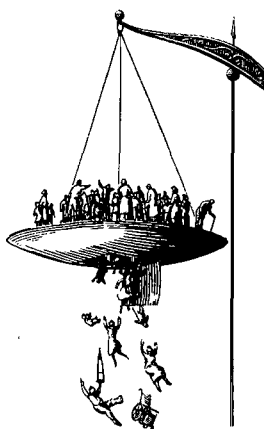
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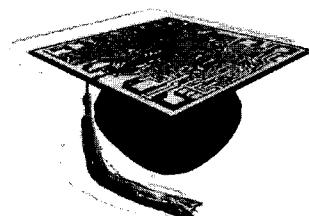
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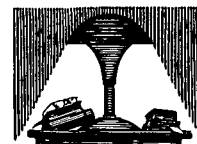
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Robert Kuttner
Publisher/Co-editor

As this issue goes to press, we do not know the outcome of the election, but we can discern some battles of historic proportions that lie beyond it. No matter who wins this November, there will be continued pressure to adopt not just a balanced budget by 2002, but also a constitutional amendment to enforce one in perpetuity. As Karen Paget argues in this issue, a rigid commitment to balanced budgets is bad as policy and worse as constitutional law. Liberals and moderates who have conceded the issue are making a dangerous bargain: short-term political gain for long-term governmental paralysis and serious harm to the national interest.

Social Security is almost certainly going to be the focal point of a second historic confrontation. The retirement of the baby-boom generation requires significant adjustments. But as Theodore Marmor and Jerry Mashaw explain in their article, the solvency of Social Security does not require privatization—the two are entirely distinct issues. In a companion article, Robert Ball explains how to keep the system secure without making millions of low-income Americans insecure. And in yet another related article, Marc Freedman gives a fresh perspective on the usual hand-wringing about the graying of America. It's an opportunity, he suggests, to fill the vacuum in volunteering created by the shift of women into the paid labor force—provided we can create new institutions that make civic engagement a regular part of retirement.

The entry of women into business and the professions is partly the doing of modern feminism, but ironically it is also the source of a new attack on feminism. In our cover essay, Wendy Kaminer takes on the antifeminists and neo-feminists—many of them successful professional women—who now dismiss the women's movement on the grounds that individual women can make it on their own. The idea of a libertarian feminism, she argues, makes about as much sense as a pacifist military.

All of these articles—along with Alan Brinkley's "Liberty, Community, and the National Idea"—are in a sense about one theme: the survival of collective effort and social solidarity in a time when the values of individual striving and the market dominate American opinion. Of course, a single-minded emphasis on collective solutions isn't the answer; we need to rectify the balance—and these articles, in different ways, help do that.

—The Editors

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert M. Ball currently serves on the six-member Advisory Council on Social Security. He was the U.S. Commissioner of Social Security from 1962-1973 and is the founding chair of the National Academy of Social Insurance.

Alan Brinkley is a professor of American history at Columbia University and the author of *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*.

Jonathan Eig is a senior editor at *Chicago* magazine. He is a former reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

Marc Freedman, vice president of Public/Private Ventures, is author of *The Kindness of Strangers*.

Wendy Kaminer is a public policy fellow at Radcliffe College. Her most recent book is *True Love Waits: Essays and Criticism*.

Paul Krugman is the Ford International Professor of Economics at MIT.

Theodore R. Marmor is a professor in Yale University's

School of Management and political science department.

Jerry L. Mashaw is Sterling Professor of Law at Yale University and author of the forthcoming *Greed, Chaos and Governance*.

Karen M. Paget is a political scientist and co-author of *Running as a Woman*.

Richard Rothstein is a research associate of the Economic Policy Institute.

Beth Shulman is a vice president, director, and executive board member of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

Shirley Veenema is a materials developer at Harvard University's Project Zero and instructor in art at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. **Howard Gardner** is professor of education at Harvard and co-director of Project Zero. He is the author of *Leading Minds: Anatomy of Leadership*.

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ROBERT KUTTNER

A Liberal Dunkirk?

Has the Clinton presidency been a grave setback for liberalism? Or a necessary, if wrenching, re-centering? We have debated this question in our pages, and historians will long argue the issue. One must await the results of the 1996 election to provide a more complete answer. However, here is a look at both sides of the argument and a tentative verdict.

Modern liberalism has been a twofold enterprise. First, it has entailed the expansion of individual rights, social inclusion, and political participation. Second, it has used the state, through both government regulation and public spending, to temper the extremes and instabilities of the private market. When the public is in a liberal mood, the polity is rendered more inclusive; and government gains expanded authority to discipline the market—a nice marriage of politics, government, and political economy.

By these tests, Clinton has failed to consolidate past liberal gains, let alone expand them. He has stemmed the slide to the right only by moving right. In the process, he has validated conceptions of liberty and opportunity that make it difficult to use the state in either its fiscal or regulatory incarnation. As the 1996 election approached, Clinton had failed to rally a latent electoral base that might have expanded the boundaries of the possible. The center had held, but it was a more conservative center.

Of course, this is no easy time to be a liberal. The market is rampant and the state constricted. The overhang of the Reagan debt adds further constraint. Even moderate fiscal prudence, of the kind Clinton embraced during his first two years, left little spare money for major initiatives. Clinton's acceptance of more extreme austerity after November 1994 left liberal constituencies arguing with one another over what to cut.

Trust in government has been at a postwar low, and sorely in need of rebuilding. On balance, Clinton has added to the general climate of con-

tempt for the competence and value of government. Reinventing government, a valid New Democrat idea, has given way to slashing government. Here, the Republicans led, but Clinton lines like "The age of big government is over" (to thunderous Republican applause) were not helpful.

Clinton took office with just 43 percent of the vote and only the most tentative of mandates. With a lineup of 258-176 in the House and 57-43 in the Senate, he had a bare working majority (though one that looked mighty good after November 1994). For many in the press and for the President's New Democrat loyalists, it was Clinton's brief turn to the left in January 1993 that was mistaken; the rest of his presidency was a course correction to express the philosophy people thought they were electing in the first place.

In that view, the ill-fated economic stimulus package of early 1993 was a mistake, both as politics and policy; the support of gays in the military disastrous; the ambitious health security plan a conceptual and tactical overreach. And it took the partisan blowout of 1994 for Clinton to realize that his proper home was the political center.

By moving right and stealing the Republicans' clothes on the budget and other key issues, Clinton miraculously husbanded enough political capital to surprise Gingrich with his toughness the following winter and to win back voter affections by vetoing Republican extremism. This was a Dunkirk in the best sense of the word—a strategic retreat that salvaged resources and enabled the Democrats to fight another day.

Even some of the most painful reversals, such as Clinton's embrace of Republican welfare reform, served to clear away unpopular baggage, deprive conservatives of a battering ram, and allow real innovation. Besides, with the country not in a very liberal mood and fiscal resources plainly unavailable for another New Deal or Great Society, better a centrist liberalism than one that is a permanent minority. So say the President's defenders.

As Clinton took a commanding lead in the polls in the summer of 1996, that interpretation seemed vindicated by events. But this judgment is at best premature.

That Clinton flailed around for his first several months has been well documented by several recent books. His first two years, however, turned

disastrous only late in 1994, when the Republicans successfully adopted the tactic of blocking everything. Much as William Kristol had counseled, Republicans were able to enforce partisan gridlock, then attack Clinton for one failed initiative after another—and invite voters to blame the Democrats in November.

Though many of Clinton's sins were merely tactical, they had strategic consequences. Famously, he did not prioritize well. He tacked left on social issues and to the center on pocketbook ones, when his campaign manifesto, "Putting People First," suggested the reverse. His expansions of rights, such as increased protection for gays, have been a blend of venturesome and inconstant, inviting scorn from both sides. He spent political capital on peripheral causes such as NAFTA, and waited too long to advance key initiatives such as health security, welfare reform, and political reform.

In fairness to Clinton, he did some things well in his first two years. His regulatory initiatives, which have gotten little attention, were resolutely liberal, insisting that public intervention was needed to correct market failure in the environment, in financial markets, and in consumer safety. As my colleague Paul Starr wrote in our September-October issue, Clinton played a bad hand well by getting the most obtainable out of such legislation as telecommunications reform, family and medical leave, and defending most of the achievements of his first two years from a Republican Congress. Readers who desire a sanguine view of that period can consult Richard Rothstein's article, "Friends of Bill: Why Liberals Should Let Up on Clinton" [*TAP*, Winter 1995].

Probably the most successful single policy, and the trickiest, was his budget strategy. The administration, after fierce internal debate, resolved to cut the deficit in half by 1996. This was sufficient to allow the Federal Reserve to begin cutting interest rates, but not so stringent as to undercut the government's capacity to launch new initiatives. Significantly, Clinton explicitly rejected the idea of embracing budget balance.

At the time, many liberals complained that Clinton had backed away from his public investment and stimulus package too quickly. But though the President received scant credit from left or right, as macroeconomics the policy was a

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notable success. Growth has resumed, Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan has allowed the unemployment rate to fall well below the rate that centrist economists consider a "natural rate of unemployment," and the deficit has been cut almost exactly in half. Clinton also courageously insisted that the deficit reduction had to come half from program cuts and half from tax increases, with new taxes falling only on the top 2 percent of the income distribution.

A policy like this not only sets priorities; it conveys lessons. In this case, the policy signaled that deficit reduction was necessary, but absolute balance excessive. And it signaled that progressive taxation was legitimate and appropriate—that the rich had to pay their share, while the working poor deserved tax relief through an earned income tax credit. This posture reinforced Clinton's campaign stance as an advocate of working families.

Unfortunately, with the single exception of the 1993 budget, Clinton's other domestic policy successes were either relatively minor, or divisive of his own coalition. His major liberal policy initiatives failed politically.

NAFTA, which consumed enormous attention and delayed more important issues, was a wedge in the Clinton coalition. Certain wedge issues were hard to duck, such as affirmative action, or welfare reform, or gay rights. This one was entirely gratuitous. No harm would have been done by letting NAFTA die with the Bush administration, and real political damage was done by making NAFTA a key legislative goal.

The other major initiative of Clinton's first bienium, the health plan, has been almost universally attacked as a bureaucratic monstrosity. In fact, the substance of the plan was rather sensible, had it

been enacted as written. What Clinton bungled was the political execution.

Given his slim majority, Clinton might have chosen to compromise earlier in the session. A bipartisan bill would have delivered at least half a loaf. Alternatively, he could have spent his first two years educating public opinion, waging a populist campaign of the people against the interests, and then gone to the country for a mandate. The actual Clinton bill, ideologically, was tailored to the New Democrat theme of blending regulation with markets. Tactically, it was designed to co-opt key interest groups: Small employers would have their costs capped, insurance companies could run plans, the indigent would no longer be a drain on providers. But big business never provided the support the administration anticipated, and the broad public remained unmoved. The defeat of the health plan became symbol and substance of the Republican fall campaign: Clinton's plans were grandiosely unrealistic, and Clinton failed to deliver.

By November 1994, the worst indictment of the Clinton presidency was that tactical blunders had cost the Democrats control of Congress. Clinton had been naive; he tried to govern as a moderate liberal, but had just not delivered enough to enlarge his slender mandate of 1992.

The second half of his term was another story entirely. In terms of pure survival, his bobbing and weaving was successful. Clinton initially stopped just short of embracing the Gingrich Congress. Having preempted several Republican themes, Clinton then surprised nearly everyone by wielding the veto pen he had said he hoped not to use. The gamble paid off. Gingrich and the Republicans were blamed for shutting down the government, and had to back off. Most of the Contract with America was rebuffed.

In the very moment of tactical triumph, however, Clinton disastrously gave away too much. Clinton had never been a strong partisan Democrat. The very phrase, New Democrat, suggested there was something fatally wrong with old Democrats. This weak partisanship intensified after November 1994, with the embrace of Dick Morris's "triangulation," distancing the President from both parties. The tactic may have bought Clinton some breathing room, but at the expense

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of his party. Every time Clinton validated a conservative theme, it made his own party seem a fringe, and made it harder for Democrats to champion liberal positions.

The single most damaging capitulation was Clinton's embrace of absolute budget balance. This is treated at greater length in Karen Paget's fine piece, "The Balanced Budget Trap" [see page 21]. The timing of his commitment to balance the budget in seven years, in June 1995, utterly undercut his allies in Congress, who were just beginning to gain some traction in educating the public on what total budget balance would cost. The combination of budget balance and triangulation has led to a presidency whose signature is programs that won't make a real difference.

Here, the ostensible villain is Dick Morris. As the work of Bob Woodward and Elizabeth Drew, among others, has revealed, it was Morris who sold Clinton on undermining his own party, on seeking a seven-year budget deal with the Republicans, and on appropriating numerous Republican themes. Morris had his own back channels to Trent Lott, and at times undercut not just his enemies in the White House, but his client, the President.

It is not bizarre that Morris was selling this formula, which enhanced his marketability as a consultant who could work both sides of the street. What is bizarre is that Clinton bought it. At several points, Morris had more influence over policy, program, and message than the House and Senate Democratic leaders and the entire cabinet. Indeed, even relative conservatives in the cabinet were against signing the welfare bill, and most opposed embracing a balanced budget.

Combined with the fiscally paralyzing effect of budget balance, Morris's particular style of linking poll and focus group results to policy initiatives created a presidential cynicism that could only reinforce public cynicism about government. In Morris's hands, a policy idea was not something that might actually address, much less remedy, a national problem. Rather, the initiative du jour was a quick response to a hot button identified in some poll. Clinton was reduced to proposing costless measures like curfews and school uniforms. This stance was a double gift of Dick Morris—a function of the budget balance and the resulting lack of resources that Morris delivered, and the cynicism and opportunism that Morris represented.

The result was what Jeff Faux has called a "pilot-program presidency," an administration bereft of the fiscal or ideological means to address national problems with much more than symbols. Morris may have bought Clinton time, but his influence intensified the long-term conservative undertow, the structural tilt in favor of the market and against polity and community, and the popular cynicism about government and politics.

I have had some intriguing conversations with people well to my left who are fierce in their defense of Clinton. I found this stance baffling, until one aging ex-radical, after a few drinks, explained that Clinton was only reflecting the constellation of forces in the country. "Capital" was in a high state of mobilization, while "the left" had failed in its necessary task of mobilizing the people. "It's our fault," he said, "not Clinton's."

Perhaps I have an old-fashioned view of leadership, but I actually think the presidency is a partly autonomous force, and not the executive committee of the ruling class. American history demonstrates that presidents have a fair amount of latitude to mold public opinion as well as follow it. Reagan surely did, as did Roosevelt. Lincoln did not run focus groups before announcing the Emancipation Proclamation, nor did Truman consult polls when he launched the Marshall Plan. Clinton is uncommonly gifted as a public educator. But he has been far too ready to follow the path of least resistance, and in the process to validate the slide to the right.

So, despite the ending of twelve years of Republican rule and four years of a Democrat in the White House, the center of political gravity today is somewhat further to the right than it was the day Clinton took office. Public spending is more in disfavor. Fiscal resources are less at hand. Budget balance is more widely accepted. Social insurance is under greater assault. Public investment has further declined. Only regulation has fared moderately well.

Could it have been different? Certainly, November 1994 was not destined to be a partisan blowout. A more judicious first two years, with clearer priorities, would have spared many Democratic legislative seats. Certainly, the President did not need to embrace a balanced budget. A reasonable fiscal test, as Paget explains, is a

debt level that is stable or falling relative to GDP. At current real growth rates, this requires a deficit of around 2 percent of GDP, not zero. The concept is slightly tricky, but not impossible to convey. Getting the dispute over budget balance off the table may have bought some breathing space, but at terrible long-term cost.

Nor did Clinton need to accept Republican welfare reform. There were ample grounds to veto the bill. All Clinton needed to do was insist that any money taken away from programs for the poor—the bill cut over \$50 billion in food stamps, immigrant aid, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children itself—be redirected toward the creation of jobs for the poor. The Republicans would have ducked the challenge, and Clinton would have had a campaign issue.

Neither did Clinton need to salvage his presidency by savaging his own party. On the contrary, Clinton did best when he reverted to popular partisan themes that made clear the difference between Democrats and Republicans.

The product of all of these capitulations is a government deprived of either the legitimacy or the capacity to solve national problems. This stalemate then reinforces the skepticism about government and politics and the libertarian claim that “you know how to spend your money better than the government does.” Politically, thanks to triangulation, we see partisan activism deprived of an alliance with the White House, and a White House lacking a mobilized mass base. The contrast with Reagan, who used his presidency to nurture the conservative grass roots, is striking.

The past century displays countless liberal initiatives that actually made a difference in the lives of ordinary people. Regulatory interventions of the Progressive Era blocked the worse excesses of Gilded Age capitalism. The inventions of the New Deal put millions back to work, brought electric power to rural America, made possible secure retirement, legitimized trade unions, and saved capitalism from its worst self-cannibalizing tendencies. Postwar government actions safeguarded the environment, extended rights of citizenship to new groups, enlarged education opportunity, expanded social insurance to include Medicare and Medicaid, underwrote science and technology, and used pub-

lic investments to undergird the long economic boom. By contrast, few of Clinton's current initiatives will make much difference in people's lives. Some happy exceptions are a modest minimum-wage increase, his defense of family and medical leave, reproductive rights, and a partial defense of affirmative action. For the most part, however, the new initiatives of the 1996 campaign are symbolic, and transparently so.

It is ironic in the extreme that Clinton has been most successful in differentiating himself from Republicans when he has invoked the most expansive liberal programs of the recent past such as Social Security and Medicare, the legacies of liberals far bolder than he. There is surely some lesson in this. People evidently value public programs when they are effective enough to make a difference. Dick Morris shamelessly used our most liberal programs, Medicare and Social Security, to flay Republicans. Even as Clinton disdained much of liberalism, its achievements are what kept him afloat.

The best one can say is that Clinton prevented the 1994 midterm result from turning into a mandate for Newt Gingrich's Contract. It is conceivable that a second Clinton term might produce a swing back toward the left, but everything would have to break perfectly. By establishing a new, defensible perimeter well to the right of his allies, Clinton perhaps contributed one blessing in disguise. (When an aide applied that description to the German advance after the original Dunkirk, Winston Churchill replied, “It certainly is well disguised.”) I refer to the shock of recognition that for six decades, liberals have become dependent on Washington. With Carter, and then Clinton, this is no longer an option.

It is fine to rely on the power of the national government to address national problems programmatically. Partial reliance on Washington, in that sense, will always be at the heart of modern liberalism. But it is folly to depend on the power of the White House as a substitute for an energized liberal constituency. Contrary to the claims of my New Left friend, Clinton might have contributed to a renewal of liberal, grassroots energy, as Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson did. Mostly, he chose not to. The next liberal upsurge will have to come from the people.

—October 3, 1996

MINIMUM-WAGE GOODIES

Although the congressional opponents of an increased minimum wage eventually gave in, they did manage to deliver a few goodies to their friends in the small-business lobby. Chief among these provisions was a measure that allows employers to pay a lower training wage to young workers during their first 90 days of employment.

Backers of the measure say they were merely preserving an existing feature from the 1989 minimum-wage law, the measure the new legislation supersedes. Yet while it's true the 1989 legislation had allowed for a similar training wage, it also came with a sunset provision that phased out the wage after three years, before this summer's deliberations. The new law has no such sunset provision.

Of more interest, however, may be another subtle change. The 1989 legislation prohibited an employee from working for the training wage more than twice in a lifetime. Furthermore, if an employee was on his or her second stint receiving a training wage, the employer had to file a detailed training plan to justify the lower pay. These provisions were designed to prevent firms from exploiting young workers as a source of cheap labor.

The new law includes no such

limits. Thus, a young worker can potentially spend his or her teen years drifting from 90-day "training" job to 90-day "training" job, earning the official training wage of \$4.25 an hour—which just happens to be the same as the old minimum wage.

THE IRS BY ANY OTHER NAME

On the campaign trail Bob Dole tempered his promise to "end the IRS" with the qualifier, "as we know it." His former Republican colleagues on Capitol Hill offered no such qualification when they introduced H.R. 3039, which they boast will "abolish the dreaded IRS."

Perhaps they should take a closer look at their own legislation.

H.R. 3039 is the National Retail Sales Tax bill, brainchild of Representatives Dan Schaefer of Colorado and Billy Tauzin of Louisiana.

In addition to closing the Internal Revenue Service, the legislation repeals personal and corporate income taxes, estate and gift taxes, plus excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco, replacing them all with a 15 percent national retail sales tax.

But as long as there are taxes—whether they be sales taxes or income taxes—somebody has to collect them. As Robert McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice has pointed out, that

means the government can't simply shut down the IRS without putting somebody else in the government in charge of revenue collection—which is precisely what the Schaefer-Tauzin bill would do.

For starters, because Schaefer and Tauzin retain the Social Security payroll tax on wages and self-employment income—they don't dare tinker with Social Security—they move the IRS agents in charge of collecting these duties to the Social Security Administration. There, the agents will do exactly the same job as before, only under the auspices of a different department. In addition, the legislation only abolishes a handful of federal excise taxes. To deal with the ones that remain—including the gas tax and customs duties—the Schaefer-Tauzin bill creates a brand new bureaucracy called the Excise Tax Bureau.

The Schaefer-Tauzin bill deals with sales tax collections by allowing states to handle collections of the proposed federal sales tax, but states without sales taxes would likely ask the Treasury Department to handle such collections for them. What's more, vendors with retail establishments in five or more states can choose to have the Treasury Department administer *both* state and local taxes. So we could have a situation where state bureaucracies and a new federal tax collection agency are remitting sales taxes back and forth to each other.

In an interview with the *The American Prospect*, Schaefer



admitted that the bill's "abolition" of the IRS was more like a grand reshuffling. "A lot of IRS people will have to go to the Social Security Administration and Treasury," he conceded. "But a lot of them will just be fired."

Maybe so, but even if all of the reshuffling does add up to a net reduction in tax collectors, it would still mean replacing the current tax system with a highly regressive alternative. That won't fly with the voters, which may help explain why the Republicans spend so much time making exaggerated claims about what they'll do to the IRS and so little addressing the question of whether their tax plans are fair.

CORPORATE WELFARE'S REAL MEANING

Ideology and polls were the driving forces behind the 1996 welfare bill, but the campaign finances of a leading House Republican suggest that special-interest money may have played a bit part as well.

By giving states more leeway in determining how they run public assistance programs, the law opens up new opportunities for consulting and information management firms, which can bid to win state contracts for managing the welfare rolls. Already, the defense giant Lockheed Martin has entered into a high-stakes bidding war with Andersen Consulting and Electronic Data Systems, Ross Perot's old company that made a fortune more than 20 years ago

when it began computerizing Medicaid billing and welfare eligibility information, over the contract to administer Texas's \$500-million-a-year welfare operation. Deloitte and Touche and KPMG Peat Marwick—both accounting and consulting firms like Andersen—are also perfectly suited to enter into the new privatization market, according to one state welfare administrator.

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that all of those companies (and several of their registered lobbyists) are on the donor list for E. Clay Shaw, the Florida congressman who shepherded the welfare bill through the House, where he is the chairman of the Ways and Means subcommittee on welfare. According to fundraising records maintained by the Federal Election Commission, the political action committee for Deloitte and Touche gave Shaw's primary campaign \$5,000, the maximum donation allowed under federal law. Lockheed, EDS, Andersen, and KPMG each gave \$1,000.

PROTECTING HIS HYDE

Hillary Clinton did some legal work for a failed thrift institution, but what if she had served on its board? No problem, apparently, if you are a good conservative politician. Take Henry Hyde, the darling of the right who chairs the House Judiciary Committee.

As reported in the *Illinois Legal Times*, Hyde used to serve on the board of directors of the Clyde Federal Savings and Loan

in North Riverside, Illinois, an institution that failed in 1990 at a cost of approximately \$65 million to the taxpayers. This gives Hyde the distinction of being the only sitting member of Congress to have served on the board of a defunct thrift.

The board, of course, is legally responsible for overseeing the S&L's activities. So the Resolution Trust Corporation is suing Hyde and the rest of the former board members for gross negligence, seeking \$17.2 million in damages. Hyde's lawyer, William J. Harte, says that Hyde served on the board at the request of a friend and that during that time "he acted on the advice of lawyers, accountants, the management, [and] business people." In addition, Harte said, Hyde severed his ties to the institution before it finally failed.

The matter is pending before the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which took over the case when the RTC's jurisdiction ran out, but—surprise—nary a disparaging word about this affair has emerged from congressional Republicans or the conservative press.

It should be noted that while Hyde did once lend his name to a publicity packet on Whitewater from the Republican Policy Committee, he has been relatively quiet about Whitewater, at least compared to some of his colleagues. Perhaps this explains why.

["Protecting His Hyde" by Amy D. Burke, other items by Jason G. Zengerle.]

PAUL KRUGMAN DEBATES ROBERT KUTTNER

Of Economists and Liberals

Economist-bashing has long been a popular pastime among intellectuals right and left. Economists themselves, however, are not supposed to bash back. So when I decided to break that rule, I fully expected retribution. Surprisingly, until now all of the really personal attacks on me have come from the right, from the likes of Alan Reynolds and Judy Shelton (it will be news to them that I bear a special animus toward the left). But something like Robert Kuttner's essay in the September-October issue of *The American Prospect* ["Peddling Krugman"] was bound to appear sooner or later.

I won't try to defend my motives or the value of my academic work (or justify in detail why, over the course of 20 years as a professional economist, I have changed my mind about some things). Let me instead focus on the two important questions on which Kuttner and I disagree:

A reply to
Robert Kuttner,
"Peddling Krugman,"
September-
October 1996.

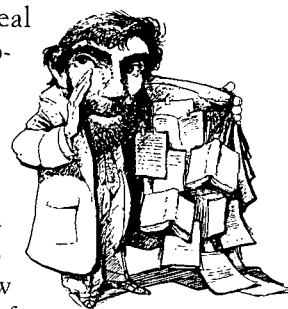
what it takes to do good economics, and what it means to be a liberal.

Some people have a very narrow definition of what constitutes valid economics. I don't. (Paul Ormerod, whose *The Death of Economics* strongly criticizes the profession, described me in a recent review as "wonderfully open-minded.") I am willing to give a hearing to any economic argument that does not contain obvious logical holes, or ignore readily available evidence. But I am not prepared to be indulgent toward ideas—like the claim that wages in America have stagnated largely because imports have eliminated high-

wage jobs in manufacturing—that fail these tests. In particular, if someone consistently produces economic arguments that simply do not add up, or makes factual assertions that can be flatly disproved by spending a few minutes with the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* and a hand calculator, I don't care what other virtues he may have or positions he may hold. He may be a gifted phrasemaker and a lion of the lecture circuit, but he is not a serious economic thinker.

To say this is, of course, to be accused of "credentialism." There is a grain of truth to this charge. Although my criteria for an idea worth listening to sound mild, they are not that easy to satisfy. For example, an amazing amount of nonsense has been written about productivity and wages by people who do not realize that real wages necessarily reflect productivity at the national rather than the company or industry level (otherwise workers in chip plants would by now be making a thousand times as much as nurses), and do not know that recent growth in manufacturing productivity has not been matched in the rest of the economy. Similarly, a lot of nonsense has been written about the alleged achievements of Ronald Reagan by people who do not know that there is a difference between trend growth and the business cycle, and are unaware of that crucial regularity known as Okun's Law. How does one come to know such things? Well, it helps to have studied some economics.

The point is not, as Kuttner imagines, that you must use fancy math; it's that you must be willing to listen to other people. Contrary to myth, economists are not all dull and doctrinaire; if you have an idea about, say, international trade, it is likely—not certain, but



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likely—that some economist has been there and done that, and that your idea has already been either greatly clarified or decisively refuted. I have repeatedly encountered would-be economic experts who begin a conversation by saying “The trouble with economists is that they never consider the possibility that . . .” and refuse to believe me when I tell them that that very possibility is treated at length in most sophomore-level textbooks—and that their radical insight is either a well-known fallacy or, worse yet, a familiar and standard part of the canon. You don’t need to have a Ph.D. to do good economics, but you are not likely to add value to the subject if you try to make up your own version of economics completely from scratch.

Intellectual arrogance, you say. Maybe so—but surely my arrogance is a puny thing compared with that of men who believe themselves able to invent a new and improved economics from a standing start, who are prepared to write books with titles like *The Way the World Works* or *The Work of Nations* without bothering to read one or two of those undergraduate textbooks first. (And don’t tell me that they do too know what is in the textbooks. The circumstantial evidence that they do not—the simple things misunderstood, the garbled statistics, the statement of both standard concepts and classic fallacies as if they were revolutionary innovations—is overwhelming.)

Some may also object that while what I say may be true, it is bad form to point it out—that we need to put such quarrels aside and get on with the task at hand. I might respond by noticing that there is a sort of ethics of convenience at work here: Some of my critics have spent years denigrating conventional liberal economists and putting their friends on pedestals, then suddenly declare that such fights over intellectual prestige are unseemly when those pedestals begin to crack. But the important point is that this objection presumes that we are agreed on what must be done—which brings me to the question of what it means to be a liberal.

To Bob Kuttner, liberalism means supporting more government intervention in the marketplace. Above all, it means supporting managed international trade and deficit-financed public investment. In fact, not only does Kuttner know what needs to be done: He knows, in advance, what the conclusions of future cutting-

edge economic theory will be. He knows that I must have stopped being an innovator after the mid-1980s, because my work no longer seemed to provide a rationale for neo-mercantilist trade policies; and he knows that the remarkable revival of Keynesianism is a rarefied academic affair of no real importance, because the new Keynesians still think that we ought to reduce the budget deficit. (Why is it illiberal to think that monetary rather than fiscal policy can be used to increase aggregate demand?)

Somehow, though, I always thought that liberalism was about compassion and justice, and have never understood what import quotas and budget deficits have to do with it. You might argue that they are effective means to those ends—but that is an empirical matter on which I disagree. The back of my envelope says that the Clinton administration’s modest expansion of the earned income tax credit did far more to help low-wage American workers than its support of NAFTA did to hurt them. (And what about Mexican workers?) On the other hand, a hundred Mickey Kantors could not make up for the human damage done by Clinton’s careless promise to end welfare as we knew it. These, it seems to me, are the issues on which we should be fighting.

When I encounter self-proclaimed liberals whose main concern seems to be to clamp down on the market economy—as opposed to redistributing the income that the economy generates via progressive taxes and means-tested transfers—I am always reminded of a passage in George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, in which he describes a certain kind of leftist who seems driven less by concern for his fellow man than by a “hypertrophied sense of order.”

There is, of course, the political argument that liberals must emulate the tactics of conservatives—that because supply-siders got away for a time with claims that lower taxes would produce an economic miracle, liberals must offer their own elixir brewed from public investment and trade restrictions. Well, I claim no special political wisdom, but I see no evidence that the public is willing to buy that concoction. In fact, my sense is that the particular wing of liberalism represented by Kuttner, Jeff Faux, and so on has been notably unsuccessful at broadening its base beyond a narrow, self-referential circle of literary intellectuals and policy wonks.

There is, however, another way to counter the conservative program: by pointing out that it is based on falsehoods, not only about the effect of tax cuts but about the nature of public spending and the realities of income distribution. Surely as a practical matter the devastating criticism of Dole's economic plan from conventional economists has been far more effective than the complaints of the interventionist left. To make that kind of criticism effective, however, you need a certain kind of moral authority—a reputation for intellectual honesty that can only be achieved if you are willing to critique bad ideas on the left as well as the right.

I have heard from usually reliable sources that the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* has no strong feelings about Bob Kuttner, but regards me with deep animosity. There is a reason for that contrast—and I don't think it is just my disagreeable personality. So which of us is the better liberal?

—Paul Krugman

My piece offered three criticisms of Krugman's work. First, while calling himself a liberal, Krugman is surprisingly hostile toward most forms of government intervention. He seems to think a laissez-faire economy is close to optimal, except when it comes to income distribution. Second, he displays an intellectual double standard, offering gentle, indulgent criticism of the most reactionary members of his profession, while savaging non-economist liberals. Most irritatingly, Krugman arrogates to himself the role of scientific expert while dismissing other scholars who write popular economics as mere promoters and peddlers. However, in his latest role as popularizer of the orthodoxy, Krugman has spread himself so thin that he makes incautious generalizations, misrepresents the views of his targets, and commits plain factual errors. The more Krugman himself becomes a promoter, the sloppier are his attacks. Such are the perils of peddling.

Though we offered him 1,500 words for a rejoinder, Krugman does not deign to correct any of the mistakes I cited in his work, or to rebut anything of the substance of my essay. Instead, Krugman begins

by name-calling. In Krugman's view, outsiders who criticize the myopia and deductivism of much standard economics are, of course, "economist-bashers," just as serious critics of Japan's well-documented mercantilism are Japan-bashers. The convenience of this name-calling is that it spares the need for serious debate. With this sweeping dismissal, Krugman then suggests a more elevated conversation about what it takes to do good economics and who is a good liberal.

Here, he persists in the claim that what economists do is essentially scientific and easily verified, while the non-economist or dissenting economist critic makes elementary mistakes "that can be flatly disproved by spending a few minutes with the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* and a hand calculator." Spare me. As Krugman surely knows, the real controversies in economics and economic policy are not about the arithmetic; they are about the assumptions.

If it were as simple as Krugman declares, the mainstream economics profession itself would not be riven with controversies about the natural rate of unemployment, the true rate of inflation, the proper measure of the money supply, not to mention deep doctrinal disputes over such dogmas as rational expectations theory. And when policy questions—whether markets are competent to provide health care, whether welfare benefits deter work effort, whether tax cuts increase investment, which public services might be efficiently privatized—are added to conceptual and methodological schisms, Krugman's claim that nearly every noteworthy question has already been resolved in some sophomore textbook is, well, sophomoric.

Some of Krugman's sweeping assertions, such as his claim that the whole income stagnation problem mostly boils down to "skill-biased technological change" are in fact highly controversial within the economics profession. Krugman's colleague at MIT, Jörn-Steffen Pischke, begins a technical paper on how technology has affected the wage structure by using a characteristic Krugman over-generalization as a straw man. Another recent paper, by Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs and Howard Schatz, observes that Krugman's discussions of the relationship of trade and wages are all over the intellectual map.

Krugman is a genuine expert on trade policy. While he attacks other popularizers, he uses this

expertise as license to declare what is scientifically sound on a wide range of policy questions on which he is not expert. For example, he does not publish articles in refereed journals on labor markets; however he parades himself as an instant expert in this and other fields where his original work is minimal. As brilliant as he is, the back of his envelope is no substitute for real research.

Krugman's own ample work slaughtering (selected) sacred cows of economic theory gives the lie to his claim that some economic theorist has invariably been there, done that, and resolved the issue for all time. What is truly obnoxious is the way Krugman blandly demolishes some theorem or other, then warns, "Don't try this at home, kids." Either economics is normal science, or it isn't. Either economists deserve special credibility as experts, or they don't. But Krugman is on both sides of this question.

Some non-economists, such as Krugman's *bête noire* Robert Reich, have contributed useful insights to public debate on how to wrestle with the dilemmas of trade, technological change, and living standards. If Krugman did not have such a burr in his behind about Reich's status as a non-economist, he might appreciate that Reich's view—that the main asset of a nation is its human capital—is old-fashioned comparative advantage applied to a high-tech society. Of course a nation's average wages reflect its national productivity, but that average productivity is built on the several productivities of individual domestic industries.

Krugman's dig at Reich's title, *The Work of Nations*, is a characteristic cheap shot. I thought the title was a rather felicitous play on *The Wealth of Nations*, nicely signaling Reich's thesis that human capital is the new source of wealth. Is Krugman's *Age of Diminished Expectations* any less presumptuous?

Krugman continues to misrepresent the concerns of critics such as Jeff Faux and me. The problem is not that trade (or technology) is causing the loss of domestic industrial jobs and the decline of industrial wages. It is rather that the increased marketization of economic life, in a global marketplace, undermines the century-old project of devising a regulated or social-democratic form of capitalism. This is the real divide between those who believe in *laissez-faire* plus a bit of tweaking, and those who advocate what Paul Samuelson termed a mixed

economy. Krugman ought to have the decency to recognize this as a principled debate.

This brings me to politics. Krugman insists that people like me are suspect because we practice economics without a license. Yet Krugman thinks nothing of practicing political science without a license (not to mention practicing journalism without reporting). There is a good reason why economics used to be called political economy. Nearly all the difficult economic issues are not just questions of the efficient allocation of scarce resources by the price system in an institutional vacuum, but profoundly political issues involving property rights, ground rules, and strategies to deal with market failures that can only be settled by recourse to values and to politics.

Here Krugman's political naivete is breathtaking. He declares blandly that the best remedy is not to "clamp down on the market economy" but to redistribute "the income that the [market] economy generates via progressive taxes and means-tested transfers." Splendid. Except just whose invisible hand shall do the redistributing? It doesn't seem to occur to Krugman that when unleashed market forces produce gross concentrations of income and wealth, the owners of that wealth organize politically to resist its redistribution. The more prestige that liberals like Krugman accord the market, the harder it is politically to overturn its verdicts. Being a trade expert rather than a serious student of social policy, Krugman also slides over the well-known political and structural problems of means-tested, as opposed to universal, programs. They create poverty traps; they tend to lack political support. It helps to study the particulars.

Economists of Krugman's persuasion know a lot, but they are not expert in everything. A little modesty would go a long way here.

The lamest assertion of all is Krugman's attempt at innocence-by-association: The *Wall Street Journal* hates him more than they hate me; ergo, that certifies him as a liberal. I could match him, *Journal* attack for *Journal* attack, but this is an idiotic litmus test. Robert Bartley already has far too much influence, and he's wrong about nearly everything. Let's not empower the *Journal* as a reverse indicator of who's the better liberal.

—Robert Kuttner

COLD WAR REVISIONISM

To the Editors:

Perhaps Jacob Heilbrunn just got carried away reaching for a provocative title for his review article called "Who Won the Cold War?" [TAP, September-October 1996]. Nevertheless, the idea that the parochial arguments of two wings of American anticommunism had much to do with the rapid collapse of the Soviet system is rather hard to swallow.

Let me suggest another answer to the title's question. *No one won the Cold War*, let alone one of the protagonists. The Soviet people may have been hurt the most; after all, their government spent perhaps 35 percent of their gross domestic product on a military machine that could never bring them security or prosperity. The U.S., on the other hand, squandered much of its good fortune of circumstance after World War II. With half of what we have spent and continue to spend on military might we could have rebuilt our cities, provided jobs and top-notch housing and health care to all our citizens, and reached any number of other goals that now languish in the miasma of "diminished expectations." And finally let us not ignore the many millions in the Third World who died or had their lives turned upside down when the Cold War turned hot, as it did so many times.

In the end the Soviet system collapsed on the weight of its own contradictions, not because of anything that Kennedy, Reagan, or their advisers did or did not do. Certainly, the introduction of U.S. medium-range nuclear missiles into Europe in the early '80s and the associated Reagan-Weinberger military build-up had little to do with it. Those who claim otherwise need to build a case on much better evidence than mere coincidence. Various Cold War intel-

lectuals may have labored hard to rationalize U.S. government policies, but their claim of credit for historical events is hardly credible.

Finally, Heilbrunn conveniently dismisses the American left as apologists for the Soviets. This neglects the fact that many (perhaps a majority) of the American left have long believed the Russian Revolution was betrayed in the 1920s and set on a course of accumulating corruption and degradation. Many of these leftists have given consistent support to democratic dissidents in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the end it was a broad democratic uprising in Eastern Europe that brought down the Wall, not the labor or passions of American anticommunists of either conservative or liberal stripe.

Charles Knight
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Mr. Knight is a senior policy analyst at the Commonwealth Institute's Project on Defense Alternatives.

To the Editors:

There is much of value to ponder in Jacob Heilbrunn's "Who Won the Cold War?" but I fear his reading of the *Nation*, which he cavalierly dismisses as a "redoubt," has been as careless as his reading of Richard Gid Powers's "fine biography of Herbert Hoover," which was actually about J. Edgar Hoover.

Victor Navasky
New York, New York

Mr. Navasky is the publisher and editorial director of the Nation.

To the Editors:

I agree with much of what Jacob Heilbrunn had to say about Cold War liberalism; not everyone on the left was fooled by Soviet propaganda. But I have to take issue with his

apparent approval of CIA covert support of repressive regimes in Central America. I have a close friend who lived in Nicaragua during Somoza's dictatorship; he saw the National Guard enter a small town and shoot just about every young man in sight. My friend had to hide in a garbage dump, under the trash for hours, to escape with his life. Covert support for brutal governments like Somoza's convinced the regular folks that the United States was their enemy, and that Cuba and other so-called revolutionary governments were their allies. Being a layman in foreign policy I may not understand the precise meaning of the term "realism," but it's clear that supporting evil governments in order to calibrate some sort of "balance of power" is a moral and political failure.

Keith Johnson
Hemet, California

JACOB HEILBRUNN
RESPONDS:

It was not my intention to argue that liberal anticommunists "won" the Cold War. What they provided was the intellectual buttressing for a containment policy that ended up grinding the Soviet Union into submission.

Still, Knight goes astray in arguing that no one won the Cold War. That the U.S. suffered losses in the Cold War is not tantamount to losing. There are few wars in which the victor has not paid some costs for victory. Nor is it the case that had the U.S. only refused to lavish funds on the military, it would have directed them to health care and the inner city. On the contrary, the Cold War made possible big government spending on social programs in the name of national security. Now that the Cold War has ended, there has been no peace dividend. Instead, the U.S. is slashing spending on social programs.

Victor Navasky is quite right to take me to task for confusing the two Hoovers. I promise to read the *Nation* more carefully in the future.

I must, in return, protest that Keith Johnson seems to have misread my article. I did not condone CIA actions in Central America, but, rather, singled out CIA director William Casey's mischievous actions in the region.

WHOSE HYPOCRISY?

To the Editors:

Hats off to *The American Prospect*. In an effort to showcase the "hypocrisy" and "hyperbole" of the Heritage Foundation ["Devil in the Details," September-October 1996], you succeeded brilliantly in revealing your own "haughty" disdain for fact checking.

Space will not permit me to detail every error appearing in this "half-baked" article, so let's just skim. For starters, you said, "In exchange for Dole's signature on a fundraising letter, Heritage gave the candidate one-time use of its mailing list for his own fundraising purposes." Well . . . no. In exchange for his signature, we lent Dole only the names of people who responded to the survey he signed—not our 240,000 contributors.

Further revealing your "hazy" grasp of the truth, you said, "Heritage's [mailing] list rents on the open market for \$26,643.33." To which my only response can be: "Huh?" We have no idea where you got that figure, which, by the way, is wrong.

Then there's this statement meant to hornswoggle your readers: "It's not all that clear for whom the donation is intended." Really? The mailing said, "Enclosed is my tax-deductible check made payable to The Heritage Foundation." What's unclear about that?

You also accused Heritage's Stuart Butler of "failing arithmetic"

in a paper on Medicare. Please pay attention: Butler was discussing numbers provided by the Medicare Trustees, not the Congressional Budget Office. You compared apples and oranges—an amateurish error the *Prospect* might have caught had somebody actually read the Trustee's report.

I could go on, but after a while your sloppiness gets a little "hum-drum."

Randy Clerihue
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Clerihue is the deputy director of editorial and media services at the Heritage Foundation.

ROBYN GEAREY RESPONDS:

The price of the Heritage mailing list came from a reputable list broker; the information about the swap came straight from John von Kannon, a spokesperson for Heritage, in an on-the-record interview. But whether or not Bob Dole received Heritage's full list or only a partial one as payment for signing his name is beside the point. Heritage—which touts itself as a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization—used a legal loophole to justify giving a valuable fundraising list to Dole's presidential campaign.

Mr. Clerihue asserts that I "hornswoggled" readers by suggesting that they might not realize the letter had no connections to the Dole campaign. The package, which *The American Prospect* reproduced alongside my article, speaks for itself. Bob Dole's name appears above Heritage's name on the envelope. Bob Dole's name sits alone atop the letter inside. The letter's closing line reads, "Please complete the enclosed survey and return it to me [Bob Dole] at The Heritage Foundation," followed by a postscript that begins "I want to change how Washington taxes, spends and regulates. But with

Bill Clinton in the White House, reform will not come easily. . . ." If you didn't read the mailing carefully, as is often the case with direct mail, it would have been easy to mistake the letter's origin.

Finally, with respect to Mr. Clerihue's claim that I made an "amateurish" error in criticizing his colleague Stuart Butler, I tried to contact Mr. Butler several times. He did not return my messages. The numbers that we used were indeed from the Congressional Budget Office, and that should have been noted. Yet those are the numbers policymakers in Congress will use to calculate tax increases, so why didn't Butler?

More important, however, even the Medicare Trustee numbers don't suggest American families will have to pay \$14,000 more to cover the rising cost of Medicare, which is what Heritage's sensationalist press release implied. As I said in my article, Butler came up with the \$14,000 figure by adding *existing* taxes for Medicare Part B to the expected increase in taxes for Part A. Even if you use the Trustees' numbers, the annual tax increase would be somewhere between \$2,000 and \$4,000—not \$14,000—depending on the progressivity of the tax that covers the increase. And none of this takes into account inflation, which will cause both incomes and thus tax receipts to rise on their own.

MOTOR VOTER MOTIVES

To the Editors:

Marshall Ganz thinks ACORN, Project Vote, and Human SERVE deserve major credit for the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (commonly called "Motor Voter"). This will come as a surprise to the national voting rights coalition, which includes the League of Women Voters, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the NAACP, the

AFL-CIO, Common Cause, People for the American Way, organizations of the disabled, and others. Speaking just for Human SERVE, we promoted the idea of permitting people to register to vote in government agencies, but we could not have influenced a single vote in the Congress, one way or the other.

Credit aside, Marshall Ganz thinks Motor Voter will bring us "closer to the norm of universal voter registration typical of other industrial democracies" because "most citizens will have an opportunity to get on the voting rolls in the course of a five-year driver's license cycle." But much of his article is devoted to showing that not many people are being registered after all, which may explain why the *Prospect's* editors headlined the article "Will Motor Voter Register?"

Unless large numbers of people decline to register, the registration rolls will approach the driver rolls. In 1990 we estimated that something on the order of 87 percent of voting-age citizens drove, another 3 percent had DMV photo IDs, for a total of 90 percent. By contrast, only 63 percent of the eligible electorate was registered.

Election statistics can be deceptive, and Ganz was sometimes taken in. For example, he reports that the registration rolls actually declined by 2.6 percentage points during the nine months after Motor Voter was initiated in California in June 1995, despite the fact that there were 800,000 Motor Voter registration transactions.

The rolls fell because California officials reported their registration totals in October 1994, and then spent the next two months purging the rolls heavily of people who had died or moved or failed to vote, leaving their official figure artificially inflated. Thus, when Motor Voter began the next year, an equivalent number had to be registered before a net increase could begin to show up in official statistics.

Ganz is also troubled that Motor

Voter transactions exaggerate success since they include not only new registrants, but a far larger number of existing registrants who are updating their addresses, names, and party identifications. True enough. Still, the point of Motor Voter is to give everyone a chance to register and to keep their registration status current, especially after moving.

There were about 12 million voter transactions in 40 states in 1995, which resulted in a net increase of about 4 million. The numbers would have been higher except that Republican governors in large northern industrial states delayed implementation, especially in public assistance agencies. At this writing (early September), 33 states have reported for the first half of 1996, and the net increase of 4 million is already equal to all of 1995. The system appears to be working. However, we do not yet have any figures on the numbers of people who are declining to register, or their racial or socioeconomic characteristics.

Another statistical pitfall: Ganz repeats press reports that Motor Voter registrants are much less Democratic and more independent than the pre-Motor Voter electorate. But many of those pre-Motor Voter registrants changed their minds over the years without updating their buff cards, creating a less Democratic and more independent electorate than official statistics showed. As a result, these comparisons exaggerate both Democratic losses and independent gains among the new registrants.

Statistical errors aside, Ganz—like many of us—is concerned that Motor Voter may not enlarge the ranks of Democratic voters because the young and the movers are not particularly Democratic, while the poor who are Democratic won't vote, or they'll vote the wrong way. What is needed, he thinks, is a massive grassroots initiative, a hands-on effort by groups like ACORN,

Citizen Action, the AFL-CIO, and the Democratic Party to visit these new voters, and persuade them to vote for Democrats.

Ganz does not tell *Prospect* readers that he himself ran such a project in California, for which then-Senator Alan Cranston raised over \$3 million before the 1988 election. The idea was to put a paid coordinator in each of a large number of poor and minority communities, with the goal of recruiting volunteers who would register a million people and then go on to organize the neighborhood, a kind of permanent infrastructure for the Democratic Party. As it happens, the volunteers never materialized, only 365,000 were registered at a cost of \$8 each, the state went Republican, and the infrastructure evaporated. No matter, Ganz wants to replicate this model on a national scale, at what cost we can only wonder. Certainly the Democrats are not going to pay; they're going to spend their money on television.

None of us who worked for Motor Voter over the last decade thought it was a magic bullet, a one-step cure for what ails American democracy. What we did think is that the incentive of a much enlarged pool of prospective poor and minority voters might prod opportunistic politicians to put forward the programs and symbols that would in turn motivate these voters, and in the process begin to change American politics. If that happens at all, it is likely to take time, at least in

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the absence of mass movements calling for egalitarian reforms.

Time will tell. Motor Voter is a national experiment in whether the franchise matters much in the context of the ruling-class money and propaganda that swamp the American electoral system.

*Richard A. Cloward and
Frances Fox Piven
New York, New York*

Mr. Cloward and Ms. Piven are co-executive directors of Human SERVE.

MARSHALL GANZ RESPONDS:

Although they certainly have not acted alone, Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven deserve credit for helping draw attention to the political significance of declining voter turnout. They also took action to solve the problem they identified. They should be recognized for the contribution they have made.

Although we agree Motor Voter will undoubtedly increase the level of registration, it is not clear this will increase turnout and, if it does, whom it will help. For the last 30 years steady liberalization of voting procedures failed to stem the tide of declining voter turnout because the problem has been a loss of voter motivation, not the difficulty of registering to vote. As Cloward and Piven show, three registration transactions will add one additional voter to the rolls. But whether that voter votes or not is another question. The 1992 turnout increased because voters believed the presidential election was close and the outcome would make a difference to them, a circumstance unlikely to be duplicated in 1996. One indicator of this likelihood is the recent Florida primary, a state in which Motor Voter has had its greatest impact on registration—voter turnout declined sharply. The impact of Motor Voter on turnout will depend on whether newly registered voters think they

have anything to vote for.

The partisan impact of Motor Voter is also very uncertain, but seems to favor increased registration by independents. The evidence is drawn not only from state reports of Motor Voter registration, but from a careful demographic analysis of the partisan impact of the Colorado Motor Voter law. We agree Motor Voter offers partisan strategists important new opportunities for voter mobilization by creating more inclusive registration lists. Whether they take advantage of them or not is a different matter.

One reason I have little faith in technical solutions to substantive political problems is my experience with the kind of "instant organizing" Cloward and Piven describe. One benefit of the many years I worked as an organizer is the opportunity to learn from mistakes as well as from my successes. And I have learned that even when these "quick fixes" win elections they have little lasting value. On the other hand, rebuilding a genuine grassroots infrastructure through which ordinary people can influence public life is critical to any effort to revitalize democratic politics in America. Witness the role of the evangelical churches, right-to-life groups, and gun clubs to the resurgent right. This is why recent efforts by the AFL-CIO and others to train organizers, reactivate local labor councils, and mobilize local communities is so important. As I said in my piece, however, the key question is whether these efforts are tied to a politics that addresses the needs of the progressive constituency as effectively as the Christian Coalition in the past addressed the needs of theirs.

KRUGMAN'S PEDDLING

To the Editors:

In his essay, "Peddling Krugman," Robert Kuttner has done your read-

ers and the liberal community a great service by cataloguing the haplessness of MIT's *enfant terrible*, Paul Krugman. We might all suppose that Krugman's mathematical brilliance and prodigious output is evidence of genius of some sort, but it is not necessarily in economics, his chosen field of endeavor. In recent years, we can hardly make a turn without finding Dr. Krugman pooh-poohing the works of everyone inside the academic establishment, and the efforts of those of us who are not blessed with the requisite credentials.

While it has been hard to escape Krugman, it has not been hard to observe that he has been trapped in a neo-Keynesian cul-de-sac. As Mr. Kuttner notes, it is one that forces him to conclude that there is no way out of the low-growth world in which we are all now trapped. We know there is somewhere a land of milk and honey, but we can't get there from here. In his fulminations, Krugman is absolutely correct in seeing that *productivity* is the key, but he throws in the towel far too easily when he says there is simply nothing we can do about it. Simply increasing the rewards to capital will bring it forth, increasing the productivity of labor.

The cul-de-sac results from a confusion in Krugman's mind about how change occurs. In his pooh-poohing the supposed menace of protectionism, he has written: "Even a severe trade conflict would have surprisingly modest effects. . . . A tariff war that cut world trade *in half* would do no more economic damage than a mild recession." Kuttner, who seems caught up in this confusion himself, tells us that "Krugman derives this conclusion, not implausibly, by taking the fraction of national income represented by trade, and then calculating how much trade really improves economic efficiency—not by much."

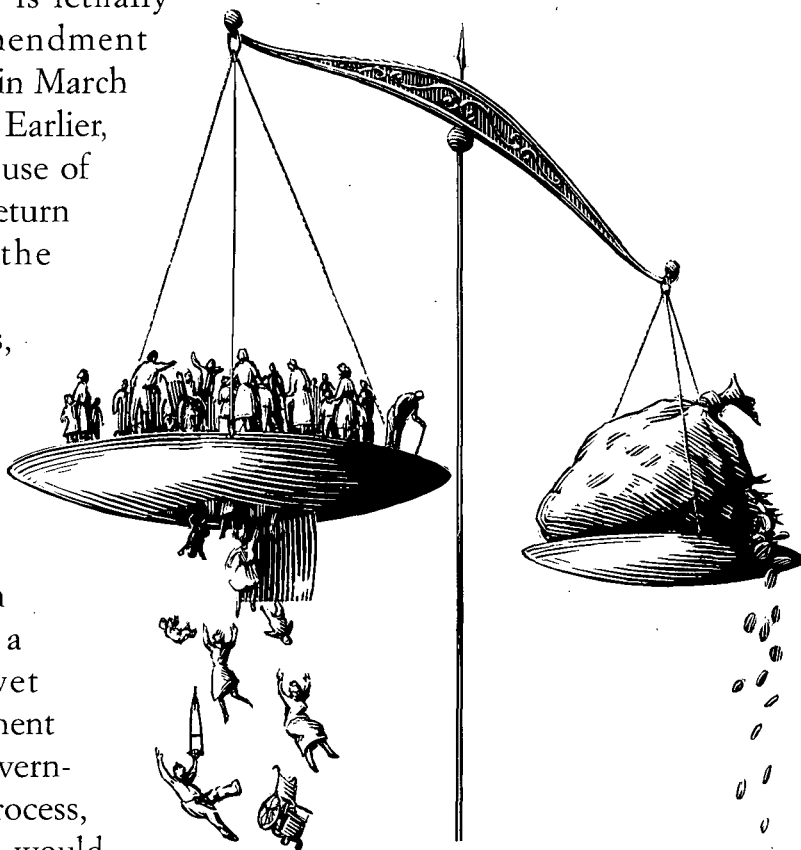
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THE BALANCED BUDGET TRAP

BY KAREN M. PAGET

Popular wisdom has it that the Contract with America is defunct, killed by the excesses of Newt Gingrich and his extremist band of Republican freshmen. The Contract is certainly dead as a campaign manifesto, but its single most damaging provision is lethally alive. The balanced budget amendment failed the Senate by only one vote in March 1995, and two votes in June 1996. Earlier, in 1995, it passed easily in the House of Representatives (300 to 116). A return engagement is likely after the November election.

Even if Democrats pick up seats, the amendment could pass, because many Democratic candidates have felt the need to embrace budget balance as “cover” to insulate themselves from the tax-and-spend label. In January, we could well encounter a Congress more Democratic—yet more likely to approve an amendment crippling to an activist view of government. Normally, the ratification process, which requires 38 states to concur, would slow any ill-considered amendment. However, in the case of the balanced budget amendment, a large majority of state legislatures are poised for a quick ratification without even a hearing.



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The amendment would fundamentally alter the rules of fiscal policymaking. Federal revenues and expenditures would have to be balanced each fiscal year. Any tax increase would require a majority vote of the full membership, not an ordinary quorum, in both houses. Budget reductions, by contrast, could be passed with traditional majority votes. In essence, the amendment embeds a "starve the beast" ideology in the Constitution and provides a continuous impetus for spending cuts.

Short of an overwhelming consensus (three-fifths of all members, both houses) to suspend the amendment's provisions, deficit spending would be prohibited whether the economy is growing, stagnating, or in serious recession. The federal fiscal role as "automatic stabilizer" would end, along with countercyclical aid, leaving many of those hurt by recession not only out of a job but out of assistance.

In economic downturns, revenues fall and demands for transfer payments go up. This requires a temporary increase in deficit spending. But with constitutionally mandated budget balance, the fiscal stabilizer role goes into reverse. Faced with revenue shortfalls in a weak economy, the federal government must raise taxes or cut spending to balance its books—both of which serve to deepen rather than moderate recessions.

The next time around, liberals may make a last fiscal stand in opposition to the amendment. But that would be too narrow a stance. For if absolute budget balance is bad constitutional policy, it is bad fiscal policy, too. And by attempting to argue that ordinary budget balance is virtuous while a constitutional amendment is excessive, well-intentioned Democrats only lend credence to both.

DITHERING DEMOCRATS

It is tempting to see the balanced budget amendment simply as a Republican ploy to continue the relentless ratcheting back of government. In a sense, this is the continuing legacy of Reaganomics, a cycle in which conservatives cut taxes, increase defense spending, incur chronic deficits, rack up debt—and then argue that government spending is out of control and must be stopped with constitutional limits. This formula is indeed deadly for traditional Democratic programmatic activism. However, no fewer than 14 Democratic Senators voted for the amendment last June, including 3 of the Senate's more liberal mem-

bers, Joseph Biden, Tom Harkin, and Carol Moseley-Braun. Another liberal Democrat voting in favor, retiring Senator Paul Simon, is one of the chief architects of the current version, which he crafted with Republican Senators Orrin Hatch, Bob Dole, and Dennis DeConcini. A few liberals, notably Simon, think budget balance would compel tax increases, as people appreciated that valued programs were on the chopping block. This view, while at least principled rather than expedient, is both politically shortsighted and fiscally excessive. Without Democratic support, the amendment would be a nonstarter.

During this election cycle, numerous Democratic candidates have jumped on the balance bandwagon. The Senate is the crucial arena, given the wide differential in the House amendment vote. Democratic Senate candidates considered generally liberal who now support the amendment include former Maine Governor Joe Brennan and New Jersey Congressman Robert Torricelli. Even labor-backed congressional candidates contesting freshman Republicans have been advised: "Don't challenge balance." This may be smart tactical advice in the face of polls indicating overwhelming popular support for balanced budgets. However, the same voters don't want cuts in cherished programs. In the long term the cost of this tactic is devastating. Critically important distinctions between deficit reduction strategies, balanced budgets, and the permanent elimination of deficit spending are being lost. Democrats, including many liberals, are undermining the basis of their philosophy of governance.

Unfortunately, chief among these Democrats is their president. Last spring, Clinton agreed to a seven-, now six-, year path to balancing the federal budget by 2002. At the time, Clinton's reversal startled his closest aides, including Chief of Staff Leon Panetta and Office of Management and Budget Director Alice Rivlin, both deficit hawks. In the wake of Dick Morris's hasty departure, press reports confirmed that the sometime Republican Morris was the key influence urging budget balance on Clinton, who was already angry that voters gave him no credit for reducing the deficit.

Clinton does oppose (quietly) the constitutional amendment, but has failed to articulate why he supports legislative but not constitutional balance. With Clinton's support for balance, the distinction eludes most voters and the logic becomes: If bal-

ancing the budget is “good” (as both parties apparently agree) and politicians have trouble delivering on the promise, then why not lock the requirement into the Constitution?

In fact, absolute budget balance as a fiscal principle is bad, and a constitutional requirement for balance is rigidly worse. The case for budget balance is built in part on two popular but misleading analogies—state governments and household budgets. The structure of state finance is fundamentally different from that of the federal government, and even those states with stringent balancing requirements are able to borrow for a variety of purposes. The household analogy is even sillier. Few of us buy homes or send children to college out of our annual operating budgets.

The arguments against constitutional budget balance boil down to these: First, as a matter of macroeconomics, precise balance would be a perverse cure for America’s relatively mild deficit and debt problem. Secondly, the amendment, in the present fiscal context, would be devastating to state and local finance. Third, it would bring the courts into day-to-day budgetary decisions, leading to an infinite regress of necessary deceptions, judicial prohibitions, and counter-moves. The text “prohibits the Federal judiciary from hearing cases or pronouncing opinions on any cases or controversies arising under this joint resolution, except as authorized by subsequent legislation,” but it is hard to imagine that subterfuges would not be litigated. The provisions governing how an emergency suspension would operate are poorly drafted, and would invite further litigation. And finally, as a matter of politics, the amendment would complete the paralysis of activist government, the public philosophy that has distinguished modern liberals from conservatives.

MACRO FANTASIES

Advocates for the amendment contend that the elimination of deficits will broadly increase prosperity and remove a debt burden that menaces future generations. The economic logic, supposedly, is this: Eliminating the deficit will increase the national saving rate and will lower interest costs,

raising rates of investment and productivity—and hence living standards. A key concept here is “crowding out.” When government borrows money to finance deficits, it taps private savings and competes for capital that could be used more productively in the private sector. Hence, if the deficit is brought down, interest rates will come down, capital will be freed for investment, and the economy will grow faster. What’s wrong with this argument?

For one thing, within broad limits there is no precise relationship between deficits, interest rates, savings, investment, and growth. Private saving can finance productive investment, but so can public borrowing. The United States came out of World War II with a ratio of debt to gross domestic product more than double the current one—and 20 years of unprecedented growth followed. The worst interest rate crisis of the postwar era, in the late 1970s, occurred when the debt-to-GDP ratio was near a postwar low. In the recent period of relatively high debt, since 1990, interest rates have steadily fallen. There is simply no precise relationship between economic growth and deficit spending, or between deficit spending and interest rates, nor is there agreement among economists on the appropriate ratio of debt to GDP.

At some extreme, year after year of deficits would be fiscally unsustainable. The debt trebled in the 1980s because the federal budget deficit was growing faster than the economy for several consecutive years. The consequence was an excessive growth in the ratio of debt to GDP, from under 30 percent when Jimmy Carter left office to over 50 percent in George Bush’s last year. Moreover, most of that debt went to finance current public spending, not public investment.

But to remedy this trend, we don’t need to bring the deficit to zero. We need only keep the annual increment added to the national debt—the amount added by the annual deficit—below the rate of real economic growth. For example, if the economy grows at 3 percent a year, and the deficit is 2 percent of GDP, then the all-important debt-to-GDP ratio declines by one point every year. The difference between absolute budget balance and a deficit of 2 percent of GDP is about \$160 billion a year of

**Look for a return
engagement over
the amendment
after the election.**

public outlay. It is the difference between massive cuts in public spending and the capacity to address national problems with public dollars. It is the difference between a liberal and a conservative view of fiscal policy. But with both parties committed to budget balance, and neither prepared to back tax increases, that difference collapses.

Ironically, the Clinton administration to date has followed the course of getting deficits below the rate of economic growth, but not getting them all the way to zero. The Congressional Budget Office projects that the current-year deficit will drop to its lowest level since the Carter administration, 1.9 percent of GDP, or well below the trend rate of economic growth. This course has been sufficient to allow the Federal Reserve Board to keep interest rates low.

Arguments over investment lie at the heart of our current economic and budget battles. The adjective "productive" usually precedes private investment, while the adjective "wasteful" often modifies public investment. Robert Eisner, past president of the American Economic Association, observes that "Most non-ideologues" recognize public investment "as at least an equal contributor to productivity and hence growth." If you really care about the next generation, Eisner says, "Cutting expenditures for children, for Head Start, primary and secondary education, loans to college students, health, basic research, our physical infrastructure and protection of our natural resources and environment of land, water and air, are precisely what will hurt our future."

STATES AS EXEMPLARS

Advocates have a ready answer to this caution. They point to the states, most of which have constitutional requirements to balance their budgets, as evidence that an amendment is both feasible and necessary. But most states distinguish between annual operating (general fund) expenditures and capital budgets that finance major public works through debt financing. Capital budgets generally are excluded from state balancing requirements. The federal government has no capital budget. The balanced budget amendment would force future public investment to be paid for with annual oper-

ating funds, on a pay-as-you-go basis. Few economists, even conservative ones, object to debt financing at the state level. But there is no companion proposal for a federal capital budget.

In addition to capital budgets, states have set up numerous "off-budget" or special funds. Originally, such funds were financed by user fees earmarked for specific purposes. The growth in the last two decades of special funds has been tremendous,

aided in part by liberal judicial interpretation of earmarking, and has reduced state dependence on general funds. Nationwide, the portion of state general fund spending in 1993 was 48 percent of all state spending, ranging from a low of 21 percent (Wyoming) to a high of 74 percent (Hawaii). California, following a national pattern, saw

special fund spending rise from 13 percent of total state spending in fiscal year 1983-84 to 28 percent in fiscal year 1994-5. New York's levels are even higher: In the last decade, special fund expenditures in that state grew 154 percent and now constitute 42 percent of total state spending.

Some special funds can incur debt. During the 1980s, Ohio borrowed over \$2 billion dollars from its Unemployment Trust Fund (now paid back with interest), causing it to run a deficit every year between 1980 and 1987. According to Frank Mauro, director of the Fiscal Policy Institute, the state of New York routinely borrows from special funds in surplus to make ends meet. This year, for example, the state borrowed \$525 million from the Medical Malpractice Reserve fund.

State balancing requirements vary widely in general, and may or may not apply to special funds. But, at the very least, capital budgets and special funds give states more flexibility than constitutional provisions suggest, and infinitely greater flexibility than the balanced budget amendment would give to the federal government. Even those states with fairly strict constitutional provisions have run deficits, sometimes for several years in a row.

Richard Briffault, a professor at Columbia University Law School, observes that a significant source of state fiscal discipline lies not in legal requirements or constitutional provisions but in the bond market. State credit ratings "reflect investors' confidence in the ability of a state to pay

The amendment would complete the paralysis of activist government.

its debts," Briffault notes, and hence limit a state's effective borrowing capacity.

Even in states with strict provisions or a political culture that strongly supports budget balance, a plethora of accounting gimmicks have been devised to reconcile flexibility with nominal budget balance. These include optimistic economic forecasts, manipulation of fiscal periods, delayed payments to creditors (including local government), underfunding public employee pension funds, backdoor financing such as sale and leaseback schemes, refunding outstanding bonds, and inter-fund transfers.

In a paper for the Twentieth Century Fund, "Balancing Acts: The Reality Behind State Balanced Budget Requirements," Briffault found these "fiscal slights of hand" were more likely to occur during recessions, "as states struggled to deal with the fiscal consequences of an unexpected economic downturn without drastically altering their spending programs or their tax structures." The federal government is likely to be at least as "creative." We have only to remember David Stockman's "rosy scenarios" (fictional economic growth projections) to imagine the possibilities, but this kind of creativity tends to feed voter distrust and cynicism.

One reason why states have averted devastating program cuts during recessions is, of course, federal aid. In non-recessionary times, states receive anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of their revenues from the federal government. When the economy is in recession, various federal entitlement programs, unemployment insurance, AFDC (until its recent repeal), food stamps, and Medicaid automatically increase monies as caseloads rise. Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project, reports that federal dollars as a percentage of total state spending increased from 29.5 percent in fiscal year 1990-91 to 38 percent in 1993-1994.

In the state of Washington, unemployment reached 7.8 percent in the 1993 recession, well above the 7.2 percent national peak. According to Jim McIntire, director of the Fiscal Policy Center at the University of Washington, "Between 1991 and 1993, federal income assistance for AFDC, SSI, and Food Stamps in Washington rose by 25 percent, or \$142.4 million dollars, and 70 percent faster than the rate of total general fund spending."

After the recession, federal aid to the state of Washington returned to a rate comparable with, or below, state spending growth. Josie LaPlante, of Maine's Muskie Institute, describes Maine's recession as "massive and tenacious." Between 1989 and 1992, federal expenditures grew by 58 percent. Maine's tax revenues, LaPlante reports, "bore a strong resemblance to a bungee cord," expanding rapidly during "good times" and contracting rapidly during bad times.

Under the balanced budget amendment, additional federal assistance to states would not be automatically available but would depend on either a national tax increase, requiring a roll call vote of a majority of all members in each house, or cuts in non-safety net programs. While the override provisions are murky, as McIntire and others point out, recessions are increasingly regional. Drumming up supermajority support for deficit spending from politicians whose states are unaffected is likely to be more difficult than if the nation as a whole were affected. LaPlante emphasizes that Maine received increased federal money before policymakers even knew the regional economy was in a long-term trough.

THE REAL "NEW FEDERALISM"

If the amendment is draconian, even legislative balance by 2002 will be austere in the extreme. Coupled with competition by both parties to legislate additional tax cuts, balance by 2002 will require spending reductions that range from \$500 billion to well over \$1 trillion, depending upon whose plan is considered. Beyond 2002, the pressure for discretionary spending cuts will continue, given increased costs in Medicare and Social Security. With a constitutional amendment, the built-in deterrent to raising revenue would only deepen spending cuts.

The Balanced Budget Act of 1996, which Clinton vetoed, called for roughly \$896 billion in spending reductions (cuts in entitlement programs plus discretionary spending) over seven years, a compromise between Senate plans and a House plan that called for even deeper cuts. Candidate Dole's election-year balanced budget plan would cost over \$1 trillion in spending cuts, according to both the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the conservative Concord Coalition.

Virtually all congressional paths to balance are constrained by the same realities. First, over half

the federal budget remains "off the table," immune from budget cuts, including defense spending, Social Security, and interest on the debt. Last year, both the Clinton administration and congressional Republicans sought increases in the military budget; this year, the Republicans have added \$13 billion to Clinton's request, including a resurrected Star Wars program. [See Paget, "Can't Touch This? The Pentagon's Budget Fortress," *TAP*, Fall 1995.]

With so much of the budget protected, spending cuts have to be taken from the remaining (discretionary) portion of the budget. (Dole has added Medicaid, Medicare, and veterans' benefits to the list of protected programs, which leaves even less of the budget to cut.) The Center on Policy and Budget Priorities estimated that roughly 30 percent of nondefense discretionary spending (\$225 billion in fiscal year 1995) flowed to the states. As a practical matter, some discretionary programs—for example, the IRS or FBI—receive greater protection than others. Therefore, cuts will not be evenly distributed, and some programs will receive very large cuts.

Second, cuts are heavily backloaded: That is, the largest cuts are targeted for the years closest to 2002. Neither party wants the enormity of the cuts needed to achieve a balanced budget in neon lights. This practice means that statistics depicting cuts in the next year or two, as well as seven-year averages, are totally misleading. Spending reductions in the years 2001 and 2002 are estimated to be 7 or 8 times greater than the effects in the first and second years.

Thus, when you combine the protected portion of the federal budget, the practice of backloading, and the retention of 2002 as the target year, the effects, especially on states, become quite dramatic. Safety net and other programs important to states, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and other health programs, income support, and education, would have accounted for a full 84 percent of the reductions in federal spending in the final year, 2002—stunning evidence that the cuts fall disproportionately on programs serving the poor or needy.

While voters loosely support the broad principle of budget balance, few have much appreciation of

the relationship between federal and state budgets. In many states, federal assistance is the largest single source of revenue in the state budget. Some state programs receive little assistance from state coffers and are almost totally dependent on federal funding. This dependency is particularly true for employment and job training programs, a fact that takes on added significance with the signing of the new welfare bill and the push to put people to work. Most states similarly rely heavily on federal money for children's services. A majority of California funds (54.3 percent) spent on children's aid, including foster care, are federal. Former

Deputy Commissioner of Revenue Richard Levin and the former budget director of Ohio, Lee Walker, found 12 departments or agencies in Ohio that were 40 percent or more dependent on federal funds.

The Twentieth Century Fund, as part of its balanced budget debate project, commissioned a series of papers to explore more precisely the fiscal effects of federal government balancing plans

on states. Despite variations in the fiscal health of individual states, a recurrent theme in these papers is that most states will be hard pressed to finance their own priorities in the coming decade, let alone absorb massive cuts in federal assistance. Most states are facing excruciating choices and trade-offs among criminal justice, education, and health and human service needs. At the same time, antitax sentiment among voters has risen steadily, significantly limiting states' revenue-raising options.

Even those states that are well off at the moment, with healthy economies and substantial "rainy day" funds, would have enormous difficulty coping with billions in federal cuts. Ohio, for example, has a growing economy. Legislators have put aside a \$1 billion "rainy day" fund, and this year's candidates are all talking about cutting taxes. Sounds good? According to Richard Levin, if these federal cuts had taken place the whole reserve would have been wiped out in five or six months.

Several other patterns that will severely limit states' capacity to respond to federal cutbacks emerged from the Twentieth Century Fund's papers. These include antiquated revenue systems, constitutional or statutory tax and spending limita-

Most states have separate investment budgets that are exempt from balance requirements.

tions, and a depleted supply of fiscal strategies to cope with big losses.

Many states have revenue systems that were designed to capture proceeds from an industrially based, not service, economy, and frequently fail to generate enough annual revenue to cover current costs. Andy Reschovsky, an economist at the University of Wisconsin, using conservative assumptions, estimated that Wisconsin's structural deficit would be \$1.5 billion by 2005. When spending cuts from the vetoed federal budget bill were added to this gap, the number reached \$2.5 billion.

An increasing number of states face voter-initiated constraints on raising revenue and spending state money. California leads the way in sheer number of constitutional mandates, beginning with Proposition 13, which limited local property taxes, required supermajority votes on taxes, and increased local government's dependence on Sacramento. This 1978 amendment was followed in 1979 by the Gann limit, which limited both local and state expenditures. Proposition 62 in 1986 limited local tax initiatives. Proposition 98, passed in

1988, established a floor below which K-14 education funding could not fall and assured a portion of new revenues. Other recent initiatives, such as "three strikes and you're out," mandate spending. The three-strikes initiative will require financing 15 new prisons in the next decade.

Since 1978, voters have passed some form of tax or spending limitations in 20 states. Jim McIntire estimates that by 2002, Washington's spending limit will result in a \$945 million gap between current service spending and permissible limits. However, when cuts from the Balanced Budget Act of 1996 are added, the figure rises to \$4.9 billion.

States have responded to current fiscal pressures by using all the gimmicks (and more) delineated by Richard Briffault. Perhaps the most important strategy has been the practice of shifting costs either upward, to the federal government, or downward, to local government. California, for instance, has used money from the counties to fulfill its obligations to education under Proposition 98, and most county executives will tell you that safety net programs as well as other basic services,

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such as juvenile justice, lie in tatters. A few years ago, only a federal bailout saved Los Angeles County from bankruptcy. Thus, many states have already exhausted options that might be used to absorb permanent reductions in federal spending.

THE BLOCK GRANT BLUDGEON

A balanced budget amendment would also intensify the current pressure to replace entitlement programs with block grants, since it would be difficult to achieve balance with open-ended spending commitments. The major welfare program, AFDC, is no longer an entitlement program, as it has been for 60 years. In the short term, some states will receive a "windfall," since their block grant is calculated based on past federal AFDC aid during years when the economy was either still in a recession or just coming out of one. At the same time, states will be permitted to use some of the money, up to 25 percent, for other, unspecified, purposes. To put it another way, states can cut welfare expenditures by an additional 25 percent without penalty. But when the next recession hits, states—not the federal government—will be exclusively responsible for financing services for those in need.

The welfare money at stake is paltry compared with the Medicaid program, which Republicans also have proposed to turn over to the states. In most states' budgets, Medicaid dollars constitute the largest percentage of federal funds, typically 40 to 50 percent of all federal monies flowing directly to state budgets.

Currently, the Medicaid program is structured to induce states to make generous contributions. The federal government matches every dollar spent on Medicaid according to a formula that takes into account state poverty levels and other demographic factors. Since every dollar spent by a state leverages federal money, it typically costs a state less than 50 cents on the dollar. If Medicaid is block granted, this relationship ends, along with states' incentives to allocate funds to the program. Any increase in Medicaid requires the entire dollar, which in budgetary terms means that some other state program doesn't get it.

Most Medicaid recipients are either blind, disabled, or low-income elderly, not welfare mothers, as commonly perceived, and the largest single category of Medicaid expenditures is the reimbursement of nursing home costs. To illustrate the magnitude of reductions in the vetoed Balanced

Budget Act, Levin and Walker sorted Medicaid recipients by category: adults, children, blind and disabled, and aged. "The federal aid cut to Ohio in the human services area is the rough equivalent of eliminating Medicaid for all 793,000 children and all 349,000 low-income adults who are not aged, blind or disabled," they calculate.

Levin and Walker do not suggest that these are the choices state policymakers would actually make; the data serve, rather, as illustrations conveying just how huge the impact on one state could be. One's imagination doesn't have to stretch very far to predict increased competition among various Medicaid beneficiaries, including nursing home providers. Overall, Levin and Walker estimated that the "transition to a balanced federal budget will cause a 27 percent reduction in federal aid to Ohio's state and local government." They estimate the cost at \$2.4 billion.

The political logic of budget making generally means that when safety net programs are pitted against education or criminal justice needs, safety net programs lose. This is particularly true when fiscal pressures squeeze programs with broader or more powerful constituencies than unemployed or low-income individuals. During the 1990s, state after state made reductions in AFDC payments, or ended general assistance altogether.

THE POLITICS OF BALANCE

While the argument over debt is as old as the Republic itself, and the idea of a balanced budget amendment is several decades old, few observers before the 104th Congress believed that such a rigid measure would ever stand a chance of success. We have reached a moment when a balanced budget amendment is broadly popular, despite program consequences that would be highly unpopular. The factors that have converged to intensify the usual tension between policy and politics include these: the excessive levels of debt incurred during the Reagan years; the ideological push to shrink, if not dismantle, many government programs; popular disgust with special interest politics; the emergence of Perot, the Concord Coalition, and budget balance as symbols of virtuous stewardship; a group of state governors eager to gain more control and loath to admit there isn't any "devolution" they can't handle; and tactical dances by Democrats fearful of the "tax and spend" label.

The recent political history of the amendment suggests just how fragile is the opposition. In early 1995, the Clinton administration did work (belatedly) to ensure a "no" vote. Several senators, including Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, Byron Dorgan, and Kent Conrad, changed their previous "yes" votes to "no" in the 31-hour cliffhanger Senate debate in March 1995, when the amendment died by one vote. But their stated opposition was based on the fact that the amendment didn't protect Social Security. The Social Security program, currently in surplus, is part of the budget, and its current revenue flow actually offsets the overall deficit by about \$60 billion a year. As a matter of fiscal policy, segregating Social Security would therefore require an additional \$60 billion a year of additional budget cuts to achieve a balanced budget.

Opinion polls show that support for a balanced budget amendment drops from 80 percent to 30 percent if Social Security isn't protected. If Social Security were protected, all three swing senators indicated they would support a balanced budget amendment, and even drafted and introduced a separate version to reflect their position. Just before the last vote, in June 1996, rumors were rife that the Republicans would agree to protecting Social Security, thereby securing these three votes, and possibly those of Senators Dianne Feinstein, Wendell Ford, and Ernest Hollings. Dorgan's press aide says negotiations never got serious. Dole wanted a second vote before he left the Senate, even though he knew he couldn't win it, to use as a club against Democrats in November.

The basis for the Democratic senators' opposition, however, is hardly rock solid. Depending upon the composition of the Senate in the next Congress, their opposition could easily become a parable about the perils of political "cover." Political cover is a kind of fig leaf that produces a voting record consonant with voter preferences, but that doesn't necessarily reflect the politician's "real" position. An aide to Daschle described the obsession with cover as building a coffin within a coffin.

Elizabeth Drew, in her two books about Congress and the Clinton administration, *On the Edge* and *Showdown*, chronicles Clinton's capitulation from deficit reduction strategies to Republican demands for legislative balance. The great irony, of course, is that the voters soon came to see Gingrich's budget plans as extreme. Every opinion

poll that asked questions regarding balance if it meant cuts in specific programs showed a precipitous drop in support. These findings suggest there is in fact room for education and leadership.

BEYOND BALANCE

Progressives and Democrats should stop pandering to the conceit that budget balance equals virtue. This tactical retreat only reinforces a mistaken consensus that then becomes politically irresistible. The public needs to know precisely what it would cost to balance by 2002. Opponents of a constitutional amendment should begin planning hearings at the state level to make clear the impact. Similarly, block grant proposals to turn safety net programs over to the states—the corollary to balance—need to be vigorously fought. Democrats should be thoroughly forewarned, since Speaker Gingrich has been explicit about his objectives, which have little to do with the efficiencies or effectiveness of any program objectives.

Block grants shift the battle to protect safety net programs to 50 separate arenas. On the first day of the 104th Congress, Gingrich told the *Washington Times*: "What I can do between now and Easter is break up the Washington logjam, shift power back to the fifty states, break up all the liberal national organizations—and make them scramble to the state capitals in Texas, Georgia, and in Missouri." A much larger purpose, however, shared by numerous Republicans, is the ultimate dismantling of New Deal and Great Society programs.

If eliminating government programs is not the real purpose of the "new federalism," then there needs to be a new and serious debate about the appropriate roles of the federal government and the states. One model that could be borrowed from the states is capital budgeting. A federal capital budget would make good policy sense in its own terms. It would call attention to the fact that public borrowing can equal productive investment.

President Clinton, if re-elected, should stop giving aid and comfort to any form of absolute budget balance. The extreme backloading, which would leave the most severe cuts to his successor after 2001, suggests that the goal has never been realistic. Democrats made a mistake when they embraced budget balance in any form. Now, they need to begin a more sophisticated national conversation about fiscal policy, before their "cover" becomes their suffocation. □

THE GREAT SOCIAL SECURITY SCARE

BY JERRY L. MASHAW AND THEODORE R. MARMOR

The elite press has urged Americans to be anxious about their Social Security pensions. *Newsweek*, the *New Republic*, and the *Economist*, among others, express a common fear that the system is going bankrupt and dragging down the economy. Polls show that the public supports the principles of Social Security but worries it will not be there when they retire. There is a building sense that the system has somehow not kept up with the changes in the nation's circumstances—in particular the age distribution of the population and the performance of the economy.

Peter G. Peterson, the reigning guru of gloom and the angel of the Concord Coalition, summed up these fearful attitudes in a recent feature article in the *Atlantic Monthly*. On the cover, above the obviously panic-stricken faces of Americans peering over the pension precipice, the headline reads "Social Insecurity: Unless We Act Now, The Aging of America Will Become An Economic Problem That Dwarfs All Other National Issues."

We too believe that Social Security pension reform belongs on the national agenda. But what is the core problem to be reformed? Is there a financial crisis that demands not only urgent action, but major revamping of the system? Must we "privatize" Social Security in order to save it? Or are circumstances that might warrant relatively minor adjustments in finance being used as a pretext for a more fundamental shift in national commitments?

We think Social Security finance requires prudent adjustment, but not major revision. Proposals to "privatize" substantial portions of the pension package have no relationship to solving financing problems. The real issues involve profoundly political choices, not technical ones: Do Americans want a society that insures all workers and their families against the dual risks of dying too young and outliving their private retirement savings? If so, we can "socialize" these risks

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only through collective social insurance. Or, do Americans want a society that merely mandates savings and investment for retirement, while leaving the ultimate security of workers and their families to be determined by their market success? If so, privatization is an appropriate response. But proponents of privatization are not practicing full disclosure. Privatization has much more to do with ideological preferences and economic interests than with the solvency of Social Security.

THE REAL CHOICE

According to Robert M. Ball, former commissioner of Social Security in both Democratic and Republican administrations [See "A Secure System," page 34], the system can be stabilized through moderate adjustments in pension formulas coupled with a new investment strategy. As Ball observes, the system is today accruing substantial surpluses, and total income will exceed outlays until about the year 2020. Thereafter, Social Security reserves must be retired to pay current benefits that exceed the level of current taxes. By 2070—that is, 75 years from now—benefits are projected to exceed taxes by about 5.5 percent of taxable wages. So unless some adjustments are made in benefit levels, taxation levels, or trust fund earnings, Social Security's retirement program would not be able—on current forecasts—to pay all its bills, as early as 35 years from now. From this perspective, Pete Peterson is technically correct: The current system is "unsustainable."

On the other hand, Peterson's assertion that something very like the current system cannot be financed is nonsense. Indeed, by gradually shifting to a partially funded system that invests in equity securities, there are ways to close this projected gap in future funding with no tax increases and extremely modest changes in current benefit levels.

For example, under the Social Security Advisory Council's option proposed by Ball and five other members, the total 75-year deficit can be eliminated, and then some, by six modest adjustments:

- extend Social Security coverage to currently excluded state and local employees;
- increase the length of the computation period for workers' average earnings from 35 to 38 years;
- tax Social Security benefits that exceed already-taxed contributions, as with private-defined benefit retirement plans;

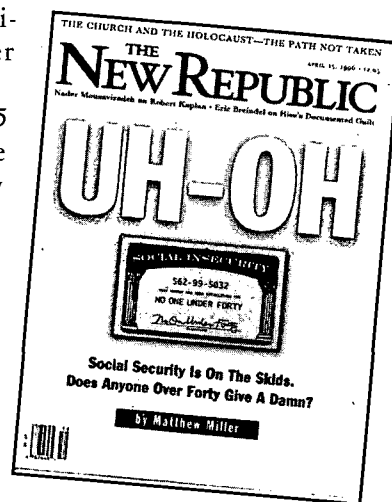
- correct the current overstatement of the consumer price index used to calculate cost of living increases in accordance with the Bureau of Labor Statistics March 1996 proposal;

- credit income taxes on Social Security pensions to the pension rather than to the Medicare trust fund;

- shift approximately 40 percent of the Social Security trust funds, now invested in Treasury securities, into equity securities.

Not only can something very close to the present system be financed, but financing it is not very hard, so the proposals for more radical revisions reflect other goals.

For example, 5 other members of the 13-person Advisory Council favor substantial privatization. Every recipient would get a personal security account (PSA) financed by a diversion of nearly 40 percent of the payroll taxes that currently finance Social Security. Of the current FICA tax of 12.3 percent of taxable payroll, 5 percentage points would be diverted to PSAs.



This system would provide an extremely modest basic pension of \$410 a month, which is considerably lower than the average benefit under the current supplemental security income program (SSI), the means-tested portion of Social Security. The money diverted to personal security accounts could be invested in financial vehicles of a worker's own choosing. Upon retirement, workers would receive the base pension, and whatever had accumulated in their PSA would be available for lump-sum payment, investment, or annuitization.

Because the PSA proposal diverts 5 percentage points of FICA taxes from the trust fund, additional revenues and benefit reductions are required to maintain pension benefits for current and near-term retirees. The PSA plan would raise the retire-

ment age to 67 by 2011, increase payroll taxes by 1.52 percent, and increase public borrowing by an additional \$1.2 trillion over the next 35 years. [For further details, see Joseph F. Quinn and Olivia S. Mitchell, "Social Security on the Table," *TAP*, May-June 1996.]

According to the Office of the Actuary at the Social Security Administration, each of the Advisory Council proposals satisfies the statutory requirement that the scheme be in long-term (75-year) actuarial balance. But, if that is true, why go beyond the Ball solution? The real debate is between those who view social insurance as worth saving and those who want to reduce government's role in retirement security in favor of market outcomes. To simplify matters, we will illustrate the true stakes in this debate by contrasting the Ball plan with the PSA proposal.

RISK AND REWARD

Both plans tie Social Security's fortunes more closely to the performance of private capital markets. The Ball plan would retain a collective system, while the PSA proposal would create individualized, funded accounts. Over the last 60 years (the life of the Social Security pension system) capital markets have out-performed real wage growth by several percentage points. In principle, this change will improve the intergenerational equity of the system by allowing future retirees (who will collect less of a windfall than their parents) higher returns.

Nevertheless, there are risks. Tying Social Security retirement pensions to the performance of the capital markets would have looked quite bizarre in 1935, when the Social Security system was constructed. And even if we do not experience another Great Depression, the events of October 1987 should remind us that the stock market can make quite precipitous "corrections." Although on average, over long periods of time, one may do better by investing in the market, some individuals and some cohorts of individuals will do substantially worse.

This concern about smoothing out the vagaries of market returns underscores the first striking dif-

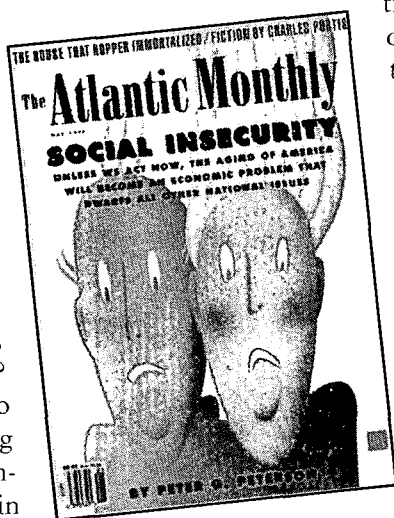
ference between the Ball plan and the PSA model. In effect, the Ball approach puts the market risk on the government—on all of us collectively. The PSA model puts that risk on individuals. The choice between these proposals is thus similar to the choice between a "defined benefit" and a "defined contribution" retirement program. Private savings, whether in IRAs or otherwise, are the equivalent of a defined contribution pension plan. Workers save a certain "individually defined" amount and have assets at retirement equal to the performance of their portfolio.

Social Security, by contrast, has always been similar to a defined benefit scheme. The federal government makes long-term promises to pay certain pension benefits and bears the risks that the performance of the economy will make those promises either harder or easier to fulfill. Historically, many private firms have also provided defined benefit retirement plans. But only about 30 percent of Americans now retire with a company pension, and companies are rapidly shifting from defined benefit to defined contribution pension arrangements. In short, Social Security is the only vehicle available to most Americans in which they do not bear market risks to their basic retirement income.

The Ball proposal allows pensioners to capture the higher returns of financial markets, while keeping the risk collectively shared rather than individually borne. The projections for the PSA plan show it, on average, outperforming the Ball proposal. But this has nothing to do with "privatizing" the investment choices and everything to do with adding 1.52 percent to the tax rate, and hence the total amount invested. If we added the same tax hike to the Ball plan, the returns would be even greater than the average PSA because the administrative costs are lower.

ECONOMICS OR IDEOLOGY?

The real issue here is not economics but political ideology. Most privatizers want to privatize because they do not trust the government, or because they believe that the American people do not trust the government, or because of concerns that Social



Security depresses savings rates.

The lack of trust argument takes two forms: In one incarnation it asserts that Americans prefer market risk to political risk. Hence to preserve the political acceptability of a mandatory retirement program, Americans will demand that they, rather than a government agency, should have control over investment decisions. The second form of the argument is that the government cannot be trusted to invest in the private capital markets without meddling with them as well. Neither argument is persuasive.

To give the first argument its due, privatization can be seen as an attempt—indirect, to be sure—to shore up confidence in the system. Americans who have “ownership” of an individual or personal security account might view their investment as more secure than a claim on the Social Security system. If so, this surely has more to do with the drumbeat of criticism in the media than any reasonable judgment of the program. The Social Security system avoids inflation risks, bankruptcy risks, and market risks. It has been running for 60 years without ever missing a payment. It continues to have the overwhelming support of the American populace, and Americans say that they are quite willing to pay some additional taxes to ensure the financial soundness of the system into the distant future. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that Americans will come to prefer risky over non-risky investments. Nor can we fully discount the Lake Wobegon effect—overoptimism among young workers that their lifetime earnings will be above average. If so, they would be increasingly susceptible to the argument that Social Security provides an inferior return on their contributions.

The real risk, however, is that partial privatization will lead to inexorable pressure for full privatization. Investment of some Social Security funds in equities, rather than Treasury securities, will of course improve the investment performance of Social Security. But if this investment is done in a privatized form, it will appear that the improvement has come through privatization of accounts rather than from a simple shift in investment holdings. And, because most workers tend to ignore the life insurance, dependents’ benefits, and inflation protection that are a part of the Social Security

pension package, this argument may be persuasive.

Even more importantly, workers may ignore the crucial protection that social insurance provides to everyone against low average lifetime earnings, poor performance of their individual investments, or against higher taxes or intrafamily transfers to support those who do have these experiences. The less stake that American workers believe themselves to have in the collective provision of retirement benefits through Social Security, the more likely political support for the system is to erode. Partial privatization in this scenario would be destabilizing rather than anchoring. It could lead to the very destruction of the economic security that

The real issue here is not economics but ideology.

“reform” was supposed to preserve.

The argument about government “meddling” in capital markets is even less compelling. Maintaining the soundness of and confidence in financial markets by massive governmental “meddling” is one of the great success stories of American public policy since the 1930s. Investing Social Security funds in equity securities will not roil capital markets, so long as investments are limited to broad “index” funds, these funds are managed solely in the interest of beneficiaries, and government is a passive shareholder. These constraints are not difficult to construct, as the experience of the Federal Employees Thrift Plan, the Tennessee Valley Authority and Federal Reserve Board’s defined benefit retirement programs, and many state retirement funds illustrate.

In short, workers would not, on average, be better off investing privately for retirement than having those investments made through Social Security. Because private investing exposes beneficiaries directly to temporal fluctuations in the financial markets, privatizing accounts will make many worse off. There is no reason, other than ideological antipathy to government money management, for Americans to prefer the PSA to the Ball approach. There are obvious reasons for private money managers to prefer PSAs.

DISTRIBUTIONAL FAIRNESS

Critics of Social Security make much of the supposed burden that retirees place on the working young. By now, the image of the affluent old enjoy-

ing a secure retirement on the backs of hard-pressed wage earners is an established cliché. But the most recent complete data on the income of the aged for 1994 reveal that 56 percent of persons over 65 would be below the poverty line without

their Social Security payments. Three-quarters of all recipients have total income, including their Social Security benefits, under \$25,000 per year. Fifty percent have income under \$15,000 per year. Families with an income of \$50,000 or more repre-

A SECURE SYSTEM

BY ROBERT M. BALL

There is no financial crisis in Social Security. But it does need adjustment. Three simple changes would reduce the projected Social Security 75-year deficit from 2.17 percent of payroll to about 0.80 percent. These changes would reduce benefits only an average of 3 percent below what present law provides and no Social Security tax increase would be required for 50 years. These changes would:

- Extend coverage to new hires in the 3.7 million state and local positions still excluded from the Social Security program (most are covered);

- Increase from 35 years to 38 years the period over which average indexed wages are computed, which in turn forms the basis for determining benefit amounts;

- Apply the income tax to benefits in excess of what the worker paid in, as is now true for other contributory-defined benefit plans, and deposit the taxes in the trust fund. Although the special exemption for low-income beneficiaries would be eliminated, 30 percent would still not pay taxes. Also, from 2010 on, the taxes on Social Security now going to Medicare would go to Social Security.

When these changes are added to a slight adjustment in the Consumer Price Index, as recommended by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the projected 75-year deficit declines to 0.80 percent of payroll. Investing part of the fund in stocks makes up that remaining deficit and greatly improves the contribution/benefit ratio for young workers and future generations.

It is time for the Social Security system to depart from pay-as-you-go financing and turn to partial advance funding. Developing a substantial and permanent reserve fund would reduce the long-term contribution rate. In the past, Social Security has never developed a large reserve for advance funding, so the rate of return on the small contingency reserve has made little difference in long-range financing. Now that the system is moving toward partial advance funding, and the fund will become quite large, the rate of return does make a major difference.

Under these circumstances, the funds should be invested to earn a higher return. These investments should be indexed to the broad stock market and passively managed by portfolio managers selected by bid. The portion in private stocks would be limited to 40 percent and would remain considerably under 10 percent of the value of all stocks.

As with the Federal Employees Thrift Plan, an independent expert Investment Policy Board, which would select the index and the portfolio managers, would operate under a fiduciary standard requiring that trust fund investment policy "be solely for the economic benefit of Social Security participants and not for any other economic, social, or political objective." It would also be important to neutralize the effect of Social Security holdings on stockholder voting on company policy. Barring the voting of Social Security-held stocks might be enough. Or the voting of Social Security shares could be scored in the same proportion as other stockholder votes.

Other federal retirement systems invest in stocks. Besides the Federal Employees Thrift Plan, the defined benefit plan of the Federal Reserve System has about two-thirds of its reserves in stocks, and the Tennessee Valley Authority has about 40 percent.

The difference for Social Security financing in

sent only 9 percent of Social Security beneficiaries. Most elderly are not rich.

Reform of Social Security really poses two distributional issues—intergenerational fairness, and fairness within age cohorts. The intergenerational

equity issue is mostly a distraction. The first generation of pensioners indeed enjoyed a windfall, but that is history. Both proposals aim to put Social Security pensions into long-term actuarial balance. Given that the burdens on current and future gen-

having part of the fund invested in equities is substantial. It would reduce the 75-year deficit by 0.82 percent of payroll; when that gain is added to the other proposals, investing in equities would completely eliminate the 75-year deficit.

APPRECIATING SOCIAL SECURITY

Individual return is not the most important criterion for Social Security, but it is nevertheless important. Young workers need to see their generation as treated fairly. The more important criteria for judging the usefulness of the program are its contributions to society as a whole—for example the fact that it provides disability and life insurance protection without regard to the health of the individual, and that it reduces the need for the less desirable means-tested programs such as supplemental security income (SSI).

Social Security keeps some 15 million people above the poverty line and millions more from near poverty. As recently as 1967 the poverty rate among the elderly was 28 percent, about 2.5 times the rate of the rest of the population. Social Security has been the key factor in bringing this rate down to about 12 percent today (about the rate among other adults). Without Social Security, well over half of the elderly would have incomes below the federal government's rock-bottom definition of poverty.

But Social Security is much more than an anti-poverty program. Because Social Security benefits are not means-tested, those above the poverty level are able to add other income to Social

Security, and thus provide a level of living in retirement not too far below what they had while working. Social Security thus functions as the bottom tier in a three-tier system that also includes private pensions and individual savings.

Social Security follows the worker from job to job and the protection before retirement rises as wages rise. Benefits once awarded are inflation-proof, a guarantee that no private pension has made. Administrative costs take less than 1 percent of receipts.

Social Security is a family protection program, a mechanism for spreading the cost of caring for the current elderly and those with disabilities.

Thanks to Social Security and Medicare, no one family has to bear alone what could be the huge cost of caring for parents who are sicker than average or who exhaust their private savings.

Social Security provides \$12.1 trillion in life insurance protection, which exceeds the amount of all private life insurance. Disability benefits are paid currently to 5 million adults, and 3 million children under 18

receive benefits. Protection is extensive. A 27-year-old couple with two small children, earning average wages, currently has survivors' protection worth \$307,000 in the event of death, and disability protection of \$207,000.

Social Security is far from broken. The more dynamic the economy, the greater the need for individual protection against major economic hazards. Social Security's benefits may be modest, but the protection is secure. □

CLOSING THE GAP

(Projected 75-year deficit = 2.17 % of payroll)

<u>Remedy</u>	<u>Reduction in deficit</u>
Extension of coverage to new hires in excluded state and local positions	-0.22%
Increase in length of computation period from 35 to 38	-0.28%
Change in benefit taxation	-0.62%
Correction of CPI by BLS	-0.29%
Interaction among the proposals	+0.04%
Investment in stocks	-0.82%
New balance (percent of payroll)	0.02%

erations under the two schemes will be equivalent, the real issue is equity within generations. Here an ideological chasm separates the two proposals.

The Ball approach maintains the worker insurance model of equity that currently undergirds Social Security. Distributional fairness in this social insurance model is straightforward, but not always well understood. First, workers are insured against a lifetime of relatively low-wage work by a guarantee of a minimally adequate pension in old age. Second, recognizing that the level of wages includes some combination of personal circumstance and effort, the size of the pension increases with a worker's level of contribution. But it redistributes by giving lower-wage workers a better "return" on their lifetime earnings.

In other words, everyone signs up at the beginning of their working lives for a system that makes two promises: a minimally adequate retirement income for all workers, and a guarantee of higher returns (in absolute dollar amounts) to those who make higher contributions over their working lives.

The privatization approach proposes significant distributional changes. Under the PSA model, the pensioner is viewed as an investor. Supposedly, higher-wage workers who save more (and those who make more fortunate investments) are fully entitled to their better retirement situation. As a matter of individual dessert, the "investor" notion of fairness seemingly rewards individual prudence and self-denial—the decision to give up current consumption as a hedge against an uncertain future. Yet a mandatory requirement to save a fixed percentage of wages rewards neither prudence nor self-sacrifice. The saver, after all, did not choose to save. And sacrifice is inversely related to affluence.

The fairness of this shift is even more doubtful when the context of America's overall retirement policy is considered. Tax policy already offers greater subsidies to the retirement savings of higher earners than lower earners. The home mortgage interest deduction and the nontaxability of IRA, Keogh, 401(k), and defined contribution plans provide much more assistance for wealth accumulation to high earners than to low earners. The current structure of Social Security pensions somewhat reduces this imbalance. A shift to PSAs would eliminate an important equalizing feature of the overall retirement system. Given that "personal

circumstance" as a determinant of lifetime earnings includes being born black or white, male or female, able-bodied or impaired, or into a rich or poor family, the unfairness of this approach seems manifest.

The imposition of substantial market risks on lower earners is also objectionable. The lower one's earnings over a lifetime, the more Social Security pensions matter to one's retirement security. And, other things being equal, the more Social Security provides one's bedrock protection against destitution in old age, the less likely one would be to prefer having that protection subject to market risks of the sort contemplated by the PSA proposal. After all, if one's investments went south under the PSA plan, one would be left with a guaranteed benefit of only \$410 per month in 1994 dollars—less than current supplemental security income payments and much less than the poverty threshold.

The PSA scheme also trades a portion of Social Security's protections—survivor benefits—for ownership of the PSA, which passes to one's heirs at death. Security for younger workers and lower-wage workers' families is again being traded for increased benefits to higher-wage workers, and particularly to the survivors of those who do not outlive the value of their PSAs. This is not a trivial trade. Social Security currently provides life insurance valued at \$1.3 trillion, more than all private life insurance policies currently in force in the United States. In short, the PSA proposal piles market and other risks on families who are poorly positioned to bear them.

The biggest winners in a shift to a PSA scheme would be families with two moderate- to high-wage workers. Each worker will have an individual account with no cap on expected returns. The PSA system thus would reinforce the distributional shift toward high-wage, dual-earner families that is occurring in the economy generally. Yet, while this is distributionally perverse in one sense, the PSA corrects what some view as a major inequity in current arrangements. Because spousal benefits now tend to smooth out returns to one- and two-earner families, some people currently view the FICA contributions of a family's second worker as "wasted." PSAs would eliminate this "unfairness."

While this position is superficially plausible, it is not compelling. First, the "loss" to high-earning couples is not nearly so great as Social Security's pension payment schedules suggest. High income

is highly correlated with longevity. High earners will on average collect pensions for a considerably longer period than lower earners. Moreover, reforming the system to make it more favorable to two-earner families has no necessary connection to privatizing it. The same thing can be done, if we want to do so, through simple accounting changes.

Most importantly, this sort of group-by-group analysis of who gets what, on average, misses the basic point of social insurance. At birth, none of us knows for sure where we will end up socially or economically. We may be low- or high-wage earners. We may marry or not. Our spouses may work or not. Our working spouses may be low- or high-wage earners. We may incur misfortune.

The current scheme ensures us that however things turn out in life, our retirement benefit will not be too awful, and our dependents will be provided for if we expire before retirement. Should we be high earners with high-earning spouses, we will receive relatively low returns on our FICA taxes viewed strictly in terms of the size of our Social Security pension checks. But we will have insured ourselves against destitution and against the risk of having to pay higher taxes to support the destitute. This binding together of the interests of low and high earners in a common enterprise, before they know for certain who they are, is the essence of social insurance.

ALTERNATIVE AGENDAS AND RED HERRINGS

Some advocate privatization as a necessary means for increasing national savings, which they see as key to increased prosperity. These claims should have no bearing on the current Social Security debate for three reasons.

First, the Ball plan and PSA proposal are indistinguishable with respect to savings rates. If we believe, somehow, that investing trust funds in capital markets is good for savings and investment, the Ball plan does the job just as well as PSAs. Second, neither plan necessarily increases national savings. Both take money that is now invested in government securities and put it into private securities. But, if the government continues to tax and spend at the same rate, it will simply have to borrow at the same rate elsewhere. National savings can increase only if overall private savings goes up at a rate not equaled by government borrowing. Changing the form of Social Security trust fund

holdings will not do the trick, nor will relocating those holdings into private security accounts.

Third, the capacity of the economy to pay projected benefits in 50 or 75 years is a function of the health of the future economy, not simply of the private savings rate. And the rate of economic growth reflects a variety of factors—public and private investment, technology, employment, human capital, business profits—not just the rate of personal savings.

The latest attack on Social Security is only a variation on familiar themes. Opponents today attack Social Security's "unfunded liabilities" and "trust fund fakery"—two of the Concord Coalition's favorite phrases. But conservative counterparts in 1939 demanded that the program be put on an unfunded, pay-as-you-go basis because government was not to be trusted with management of retirement-fund reserves. In 1983 and again in 1996, Social Security opponents claimed the system was going bankrupt—yet in 1989 they also attacked it for running huge surpluses. If bankruptcy and surplus are both crises, something other than financial prudence has to be driving these concerns.

Beneath the surface of a technocratic debate about Social Security's tax rates, benefit schedules, and long-term financial projections, there is a deep ideological divide between opponents and defenders of social insurance. Defenders, like us, see necessary adjustments as a natural and inevitable evolution. Opponents see these occasions as opportunities for radical revision—times for convincing the American public that social insurance is an unfair, unsustainable sham.

Privatizing reforms can be a legitimate means to public objectives where government failure is likely, and where private markets reliably produce superior results. We can fairly debate whether private contractors, or vouchers, introduce beneficial competition in many public programs, without compromising their purposes. Privatizing Social Security, by contrast, is a contradiction in terms. It not only fragments our most successful and universal program, but changes the entire dynamics of the program in order to fit the imperatives of private markets. By itself, the market can provide investment vehicles, but it cannot supply social insurance.□

THE AGING OPPORTUNITY

BY MARC FREEDMAN

AMERICA'S ELDERLY AS A CIVIC RESOURCE

Maine Medical Center is the state's best hospital, the place where the region's sickest children come for extended treatment even though their parents often have to return home, four or five hours away, to work and other children. The result is eight-year-olds left alone to battle cancer. This is where Aggie Bennett and Louise Casey, both nearly 80 years old, come in. Their role is to become surrogate family for children on the pediatrics ward. Four hours a day, five days a week, for car fare and a daily stipend of about nine dollars, these Foster Grandparent volunteers serve as a steady source of love and support.

"I don't think I'd been here a year," Aggie recalls, "when the head of the unit asked me, 'How strong a person are you?' I said, 'Well, I've always prided myself that I was strong.' She said, 'We got a baby that is dying, and we promised that mother that her baby would not die in a crib. Do you think you could hold her?' Well, they put me in a room here, they kept checking on me, and that baby didn't die in no crib . . . that baby died in my arms. . . . I didn't feel fear . . . I just felt good. You know how it is, Louise, when you just sit with them, and your heart's aching, but you don't let them know it, that's all."

Aggie and Louise have no plans to quit. Aggie tried retirement once before, after a life raising two children on her own and working as a waitress and secretary. It left her feeling useless, isolated, and depressed. At her daughter's pleading, she agreed to try the Foster Grandparent Program for one week: "That one week," she explains, "turned out to be 19 years."

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AMERICA'S ONE GROWING RESOURCE

The United States is in the midst of a demographic revolution. There are twice as many older adults today as there were 30 years ago; soon nearly a quarter of the population will be more than 65 years old. By the middle of the next century, for the first time, the number of Americans over 65 will exceed those under 18.

For the most part, this transformation is portrayed as a source of new strains on families, the economy, and the federal budget. We don't hear about Aggie and Louise but rather about a vast and selfish cohort of elders out to bankrupt posterity. Investment banker Pete Peterson, co-founder of the Concord Coalition, foresees fiscal doom and complains that Americans believe "they have an inalienable right to live the last third of their adult lives in subsidized leisure." Even the liberal economist Lester Thurow, a contributing editor of this magazine, describes the older population as a new "revolutionary class" that is "bringing down the social welfare state" and "threatening the investments that all societies need . . . to have a successful future." Peterson and Thurow are joined by a parade of columnists and editorial writers who envision an aging America as a land of gleaming hospitals and decaying schools.

While we do need adjustments in Social Security, the prevailing pessimism about the graying of America is blinding us to the great promise of this change. From a social perspective, the aging society may be not so much a problem to be solved as an opportunity to be seized—provided we can learn to harness the talent and civic potential of our senior citizens. After all, our elder population is, quite possibly, this country's only increasing natural resource.

WHO'S GOT THE TIME?

The American "heart readily leans to the side of kindness," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America*. A century and a half later, it's hard to be so sure. Observers across the political spectrum are sounding the civic alarm, citing research indicating diminished community involvement. According to a 1994 Gallup survey conducted for Independent Sector, a group that represents nonprofit organizations, the proportion of adults who volunteer declined from 54 to 48 percent between 1989 and 1993. In absolute numbers, that's

a decrease of nearly 10 million volunteers, from 98.4 million in 1989 to 89.2 million in 1993. The survey also indicated that three-quarters of volunteers give fewer than five hours per week and that the percentage of volunteers giving fewer hours than they did the previous year has jumped substantially.

Changes in the role of women may be one of the key factors in this shift. For most of this century, through a myriad of unpaid, undervalued, often unnoticed tasks, women have served as the glue in American communities. But today 61.7 percent of mothers with preschoolers (and half of all mothers with infants) are working at paid jobs, up from 19 percent in 1960. And two-thirds of employed mothers work full time. Berkeley sociologist Arlie Hochschild has shown that when child rearing, housework, and paid employment are combined, women work 15 more hours a week than men do—equivalent to an extra month of 24-hour days each year. After a work week of 70 or 80, or even 100, hours, how many people have the time and energy for a third shift laboring on behalf of the greater good? It is no wonder that PTA membership has plummeted from 12 million to 7 million since the mid-1960s.

In the eyes of reactionaries, the civic crisis is another reason for women to resume their traditional role. A recent *Commentary* article ("Why Mothers Should Stay Home") by David Gelernter, a computer science professor at Yale, chastises the women's movement for championing equal employment instead of "a national corps of full-time mothers" serving "as the mainstay of community and civil society." But this ignores the profound economic, psychological, and social forces propelling women to work. Even as Gelernter admits, a full-time mother corps is now unrealistic. A more promising route to civic renewal resides in looking forward, not hoping history will suddenly begin running backward.

America's burgeoning older population could come to succeed women as the new trustees of civic life, provided we create institutions and opportunities for service enabling seniors to make a genuine contribution while benefiting themselves in the process. America now possesses not only the largest, but also the healthiest, best-educated, and most vigorous group of seniors in history. Only 5 percent of older adults reside in nursing homes; fewer than 20

percent face substantial disability, and more than 60 percent report no disability whatsoever. And older adults have what the working-age population lacks: time.

First, elders have time to care. As the British historian Peter Laslett observes, free time was once the exclusive province of the aristocracy; today it is the democratic possession of millions of citizens, those in later life. Retirement frees up 25 hours a week for men and 18 hours for women, according to time-diary studies conducted by the University of Maryland's Survey Research Center. And more people are retiring earlier. In 1948, 90 percent of men between 55 and 64 were working; nearly a half century later, only 67 percent are in the paid labor force. Many Americans now at work will spend a third or more of their adult life in retirement.

Second, seniors have more time lived. They have practical knowledge, and in some cases wisdom, gained from experience. And because they carry with them a world lost to younger generations, they may well be our greatest practical repository of the social capital that Robert Putnam and others fear is drying up [see "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *TAP*, Winter 1996].

Third, seniors' time left to live may give them special reason to become involved in the civic and voluntary work that others cannot perform. The awareness in old age that death is closer than birth may inspire reflection about the legacy that we leave behind. According to the late psychologist Erik Erikson, the hallmark of successful late-life development is the capacity to be generative, to pass on to future generations what one has learned from life. For Erikson, this notion is encapsulated in the understanding, "I am what survives of me."

In addition, a number of recent studies suggest that more older adults may be willing to volunteer. A 1992 Louis Harris survey sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund estimates the number of older adults not currently volunteering but willing and able to do so at 6 million. A survey by the federal Administration on Aging from 1991 puts the number at 14 million and states that a quarter of the 15 million older adults currently

serving say they would prefer to put in more time. While surveys of this type are prone to overstatement, the responses probably reflect a healthy dose of enlightened self-interest. Several studies follow-

ing people over their lives link strong social ties and community engagement to prolonged physical and mental health in old age.

So one might expect to see much clamoring to engage elders in service to communities, but the opposite is true. Volunteering falls off sharply after retirement. Although the levels of volunteering have

improved substantially since the early 1960s, older Americans still serve less than any other age group, even those overwhelmed adults in their middle years.

How do older Americans spend their time? They watch more television than any other age group does—a staggering half of all elders' free time. Housework is the next major activity absorbing time liberated in later life. It is no surprise that a majority of older respondents to a recent Louis Harris poll lament the loss of usefulness after retirement.

INSTITUTIONAL LAG

Perhaps the best way to get older Americans to serve is to ask them—but simply asking is not enough. While the graying of America is dramatically changing the social landscape, we have yet to develop the institutions appropriate to the new demographic realities, a mismatch that former National Institute on Aging director Matilda White Riley calls "structural lag" and that historian Daniel Boorstin attributes to America's longstanding conception of itself as a young nation. According to Boorstin, we have been ingenious at inventing institutions to make full use of the resources of youth, such as the system of land grant colleges. However, our youth-focused orientation serves us less well as our population ages and we require new institutions that make full use of the resources of age.

To rectify this situation, a growing number of leaders have called for a service corps aimed at attracting and mobilizing older adults on behalf of communities. Physician and gerontologist Robert

America has the
largest, healthiest, best-
educated, and most
vigorous group of seniors
in history.

Butler first proposed such an arrangement 25 years ago in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Why Survive?* Others argue specifically that the talents of seniors be applied to helping children. Brookings economist Laurel McFarland proposes creating a senior service corps specializing in child care (a "Pepper Corps," named in honor of the late congressman and elderly advocate, Claude Pepper). Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an economist and author, contends that "tapping the energy and compassion of seniors might go some distance toward filling the enormous parenting deficit in our society."

But would older Americans respond to the call for service on a substantial scale? And would they do work of genuine value? Small but compelling pilot programs suggest the kinds of contributions seniors might make. In Hilton Head, South Carolina, a group of retired physicians and nurses have formed a free health clinic providing, among other things, preventive care for low-income families. In Virginia and Montana, the Senior Environmental Corps is dedicated to alerting doctors, the elderly, and the public to the special environmental hazards faced by the older population. In Massachusetts, a group of downsized electrical workers is helping young ex-criminal offenders make the transition to productive life in the community.

Most directly relevant, we already have a National Senior Service Corps, or Senior Corps, a remarkable but little-known program administered by the Corporation for National Service and enlisting half a million elders in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Senior Companion Program, and Foster Grandparent Program at an annual federal cost of about \$140 million. (Of the half million volunteers, approximately 60,000, including all Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions, serve at the half- to full-time levels associated with national service.) The Senior Corps is America's "other" national service program—and our best glimpse at how engaging older Americans might be accomplished on a grander scale.

Establishment of the Senior Corps resulted as much from historical accident and political expediency as from enlightened vision. Lyndon Johnson hardly ignored the elderly—Medicare, which pays their medical bills, and Medicaid, which covers long-term care, were the

biggest programs to emerge from the Great Society. But the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the central command of the war on poverty, effectively ignored seniors until Florida Senator George Smathers, backed by Bobby and Ted Kennedy, held up OEO's budget in 1965, demanding that the Johnson administration do something for the elderly poor.

As a result, the Office of Aging at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare was ordered to devise an initiative engaging low-income seniors in community service for vulnerable children. When the office unveiled its proposal, however, the nation's most progressive children's organizations—mostly hospitals and large institutions for developmentally disabled youth—rejected the model as preposterous. The elders would have little to contribute to children, they complained; besides, seniors would spread disease and probably even lack the wherewithal to get to the job. The agencies actually refused to take the government's money.

Facing a mid-summer deadline, the Office of Aging hurriedly redesigned what would become the Foster Grandparent Program, pairing elders and disadvantaged or disabled children, one-on-one, 20 hours a week, for a small tax-free stipend (\$2.45 an hour today). Ultimately, 24 children's organizations were persuaded to participate (although once funded, more than a few simply dispatched elders to change bedpans and take out the trash, until federal officials showed up again, threatening to take back the cash).

IF YOU BUILD IT . . .

The Foster Grandparent Program has turned out not only to be one of the survivors from the Great Society, but one of the era's hidden triumphs. However, its growth has been achingly slow. Each year, because of insufficient funds, the Foster Grandparent Program turns away thousands of older adults eager to devote 20 hours each week to helping young people in dire circumstances. Nationally, with little advertising, the initiative maintains a waiting list equivalent to one-quarter of its approximately 25,000 slots.

The record of the Foster Grandparent Program suggests that if we build appealing service opportunities for older adults, they will come forward. More than 70 evaluations of the initiative confirm that elders will not only be able to make a substan-

tial contribution through service—as the experience of Aggie and Louise illustrates—but take a great deal from it themselves. “Every dollar gets spent twice” is the program’s informal motto.

As three decades of the Foster Grandparent Program, Senior Companion Program, and RSVP testify, it is feasible to engage seniors in service on a national scale while maintaining standards of quality and core principles. Since most elders already receive Social Security and other benefits, they don’t need anything close to the income support that national service for youth requires. (Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions receive approximately \$2,500 a year in return for half-time service.) These programs are the kind of government that even conservatives can love: promoting voluntarism and stronger communities at low cost, without suffocating local control.

Although national service has now become a partisan issue, the Senior Corps has spanned Democratic and Republican administrations across three decades, enjoying some bipartisan support. The Foster Grandparent Program may have had its roots in the War on Poverty, but it also can claim the adoration of Nancy Reagan. In *To Love a Child*, her 1982 book extolling the program, the former First Lady declares, “The Foster Grandparent Program is my baby, and my involvement during the past fifteen years has been like watching my child grow up.” She even convinced Frank Sinatra, in what must have been one of the more bizarre moments in the history of American social policy, to croon about the Foster Grandparent Program as part of the program’s twentieth anniversary.

For all their virtues, the Senior Corps programs also have profound limitations. Both the Foster Grandparent Program and the Senior Companion Program (similar to the Foster Grandparent Program but focused on assisting frail elders to live independently) are restricted to volunteers with low incomes. Participants are limited to working one-on-one with clients. And as sizable waiting lists reflect, the programs are too small and too scattered. It is difficult to find even a single community where the Senior Corps represents a strong, visible

presence, and the programs are available in only a fraction of counties across the country. In short, a considerable gap continues to exist between promise and practice.

If we build appealing service opportunities for older adults, they will come forward.

Recognizing this gap, the 1995 White House Conference on Aging recommended doubling the Senior Corps by the turn of the century. Doing so will require rethinking national service, long associated in the public mind with young people in programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps, Peace

Corps, and now AmeriCorps. Yet “cracking the atom” of senior service, as former Senator Harris Wofford—now CEO of the Corporation for National Service—has vowed to do, might make both substantive and political sense.

In a Ford Foundation study examining the feasibility of national service, policy analysts Richard Danzig and Peter Szanton concluded that older adults “may have more to give and more reason to benefit from national service than any other age group.” In the context of battles over Social Security and Medicare, refocusing on opportunities for older Americans to give back to society might find considerable response. This past year, as Republicans in Congress were slashing the AmeriCorps program, they nonetheless restored funds to the Foster Grandparent Program and the other Senior Corps programs.

While more money will take us part of the way, we also need to create new opportunities for senior service. One such experiment is the new Experience Corps, a pilot program jointly sponsored by the Corporation for National Service, Johns Hopkins Medical School, and Public/Private Ventures, the Philadelphia social policy development organization where I work. The Experience Corps builds on the best features of the Foster Grandparent Program to mobilize a critical mass of neighborhood elders on behalf of inner-city elementary schools. The aim is to make schools more caring and personal places and to bolster ties between these institutions and their surrounding neighborhoods.

Through the Experience Corps, elders not only work directly with children as tutors and mentors but also serve as leaders in expanding parental involvement and service-learning opportunities for

students. While the project encourages a substantial half- to full-time commitment by volunteers (including a tax-free stipend of up to \$200 a month and free classes from the Elderhostel organization), elders unprepared to make so big a commitment can serve without pay for either a few hours a week or more intensively in short-term assignments.

The Experience Corps is also aimed at rebuilding the constituency for public schools among elders. This may sound utopian, but in the early 1980s, Miami began actively recruiting elder school volunteers and built a corps 2,500 strong. These volunteers played a critical role in passing an important school bond issue. In March 1988, 72 percent of older adults voted for the bond—a remarkable level of support, considering that many of the elderly in Miami have grandchildren in other states.

LEAVING A LEGACY

The retirement of 75 million baby boomers will almost certainly force redefinition of what it means to grow old in America. In the coming upheaval, Erik Erikson's notion that "we are what survives of us," of generativity at both the individual and societal levels, might well serve as a framework for deliberations—and a counterbalance to prevailing notions that the elderly are posterity's enemies.

Who better to revitalize the sense of generativity in society, to cultivate and nurture connection, interdependence, and care for the future, than older adults? Elders have the time to care. In developmental terms, they need to care. Society desperately needs new sources of caring. If elders do not step in to fill the civic vacuum, who will?

For all its appeal, such a shift won't happen easily, or automatically, just as a result of having more older adults. And we can no longer rely on the historical serendipity that bequeathed us the Foster Grandparent Program and its companion programs. Rather, we will need a deliberate effort to construct the "institutional inheritance," as Peter Laslett calls it, capable of making generative opportunities available and attractive to coming waves of Americans.

William James, who first raised the idea of national service for young people in 1906, observed in his later years, "The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast us." There could be no clearer articulation of why our elders need the very engagement in our communities that we need of them. □

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WILL CLASS TRUMP GENDER?

BY WENDY KAMINER

THE NEW ASSAULT ON FEMINISM

“I’ve long held the theory that when a woman wants to change her life, or some aspect of it that is bothering her, she first does something to her hair,” writes Danielle Crittenden, in a stab at political commentary. As a young and conservative writer, Crittenden regularly addresses social issues with housewifely tartness, extolling Cinderella as a “role model” for little girls and chastising a woman who resists being addressed by her husband’s name.

Crittenden is a columnist for the *Women’s Quarterly*, the journal of the oddly named Independent Women’s Forum. The IWF, in the name of a postfeminist female autonomy, regularly espouses views that have traditionally rationalized, indeed demanded, women’s dependence on men: The sexes are destined to inhabit different spheres (women belong neither in combat nor at the state-run Virginia Military Institute, now under court order to integrate); professional women should be prepared to sacrifice their careers to their husbands (particularly in Washington, women should adopt the role of “supportive political spouse”); abortion rights advocates are “rigid ideologues” opposed to reasonable restrictions on reproductive choice such as bans on late abortions. The morale of the pro-choice movement has collapsed, Candace Crandall writes in the *Women’s Quarterly*, because abortion “has become linked to sexual irresponsibility and the degradation of sound values and human life.”

You may hear in all this a call for women to abandon the quest for independence and autonomy, but the Independent Women’s Forum claims to advocate “individual freedom and

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personal responsibility." IWF was founded in 1992 by a small group of politically conservative, politically connected female supporters of Clarence Thomas. Today, it offers a worldview that might be called Women's Libertarianism—a vision of the striving individual woman, liberated from feminist conceits and government controls, succeeding in the free market. According to IWF, it is feminism, accused of exalting female victimization, that would turn women back to whiny dependency.

Assuming that we already live in a meritocracy, conservative critics of feminism see "victimism" in every complaint about sex discrimination and every demand for government action to remedy it. In their view, the feminist movement has become a refuge for incompetent, insecure women seeking political excuses for their personal failures. Even feminist protests of sexual violence are dismissed. Undaunted by evidence to the contrary, IWF Executive Vice President Anita K. Blair asserts that "few" women suffer "actual" injuries in domestic assaults. (The American Medical Association estimates that some 4 million women a year are severely assaulted by husbands and boyfriends.)

IWF tends to premise its arguments on empirical claims about progress toward women's equality. Champions of traditional family values on the religious right may argue still that God intended women to stay home, but feminism's more sophisticated challengers have adapted to women's presence in the professional marketplace. Now that the belief in white-male supremacy has lost respectability, the preferred argument against government activism on civil rights is that equality has been achieved—and who better to advance it than successful female professionals?

Selling libertarianism (economic libertarianism, that is) as the path to liberation, the Independent Women's Forum is the women's auxiliary of the conservative elite. Its board of directors includes former NEH Chairwoman Lynne Cheney, Ricky Silberman, former vice-chair of the EEOC, writer Midge Decter, and economist Wendy Lee Gramm,

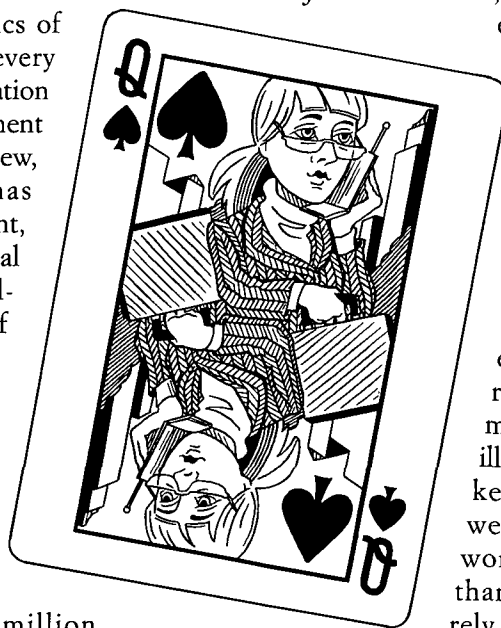
the wife of Senator Phil Gramm. The IWF is a locus for accomplished Washington women and the wives of accomplished Washington men: Barbara Ledeen, wife of former national security consultant Michael Ledeen, is executive director; members include the Mesdames Laxalt, Bork, and Bennett. IWF has access to the media and to conservative philanthropy, receiving support from the Olin, Bradley, and Carthage Foundations. Members such as Laura Ingraham, former clerk to Justice Thomas, are becoming a familiar presence on the nation's op ed pages and news shows.

The presence of prominent right-wing careerists gives IWF the look of a neo-feminist group, but it is expressly antifeminist, aiming to bury feminism, not revive it, according to Danielle Crittenden. Its appeal to affluent women echoes Republican rhetoric blaming big government for many of the nation's ills. It is, however, easier to market economic libertarianism to wealthy professional women or women married to wealthy men than to wage earners who might rely upon government to monitor workplace safety and discrimination

or maintain the nation's parks. While opposing affirmative action and legislation extending new civil rights to women, such as the Violence Against Women Act, IWF doesn't doubt the professional capabilities of individual women or denigrate their successes. It simply denies that they confront social or institutional obstacles to advancement.

CLASSY LADIES

IWF's support for female professionalism, however, is contradicted by a tenacious attachment to traditional notions of gender difference. Its journal, the *Women's Quarterly*, is like a pre-feminist woman's fashion magazine—arch and relentlessly girlish. A typical article, by Anne Roche Muggeridge, fondly recalls the now discredited tradition of whistling at women on the street: "[W]hen a group of young, handsome male strangers spontaneously burst into a chorus of admiring notes, a girl must, even in her confusion and diffidence, experience a



glow of pleasure and a dawning self-confidence," she writes, and you expect her to burst into a chorus of "I Enjoy Being A Girl."

The *Women's Quarterly* is strictly for "female females." Its logo is a cartoon of a prototypical upper-class hostess from 1955: A woman in a low-cut, full-skirted cocktail dress cinched in at the waist is holding a coffee cup, smiling and winking with one eyebrow arched. She looks like Betty or Veronica at a 15th reunion.

Advertising for itself, the *Quarterly* is self-consciously retro: "Want something chic, trim, and in a timeless color? Something that won't make you feel too fat or plain? Something that will make passersby think you're witty and intelligent?" a subscription pitch asks. "Wear the latest issue tucked under your arm, or over your face while snoozing on the shuttle, or to attract the interest of the man at the next table in a 'hot' bistro; it can also be improvised as a fabulous little hat in a sudden squall. . . . And it won't push you over your credit limit. (Just \$16.95 at our special introductory rate. Think of the savings! That's about \$500 less than a Prada bag, and a good \$10,000 less than a *couture* suit.)"

But, as this ad makes clear, at the Independent Women's Forum gender solidarity (girlishness) is strictly bounded by class. One solution to poverty and unemployment proposed in the *Women's Quarterly* is a return to domestic servitude. "[I]f factory jobs are disappearing, why not put unskilled workers to tasks which they once did very well," Anne Applebaum asks. "Making it easier for the new working class—that is, the middle class—to hire domestic servants is a much better and more intelligent solution to the problem of long-term unemployment than anything else proposed." As proof that this approach has "worked in the past," Applebaum cites *Mary Poppins*, describing it as "a film which depicted a bank manager and his nanny in 1910. Before income tax, before unemployment tax, that bank manager could afford not only a nanny but two other staffers as well."

When the Independent Women's Forum acknowledges that "it does not speak for all women," you can credit it with truth in advertising. Its embrace of femininity is trumped by its alle-

giance to class. This class bias helps explain the insistence that equality has been achieved: Life does seem relatively fair for affluent women, once you've denied the persistence of racism and sexual violence and intimidation. If you focus merely on expanded legal access to education and employment enjoyed by the middle and upper classes, America may look like a meritocracy in which women enjoy unprecedented freedom and opportunities.

Indeed, according to IWF board member Midge Decter, American women suffer from the existential anxiety attendant on too much freedom.

Writing in the *Women's Quarterly*, Decter characterizes feminism as a "paroxysm of cosmic greed. . . . Why should there have been an explosion of angry demand on the part of women who as a group were the freest, healthiest, wealthiest, longest-lived, and most comfortably situated people the world had yet laid eyes upon," she asks, as if that described most women—as if the women's movement were simply a

collection of wealthy women clamoring for bigger clothing allowances.

It's easy to see why conservative foundations support organizations like the Independent Women's Forum. The feminist campaign against sexual harassment, one of their favorite targets, is particularly vulnerable to attack, because, in some cases, with little regard for free speech, it does propose over-regulation of workplace behavior, based on assumptions about feminine vulnerability. (Not all women cringe at risqué jokes or pinups, which some would like to ban from the workplace.) The critique of sexual harassment, which is most credible when offered by professional women, is an effective segue into a broad critique of worker protections. Thus the occasional excesses of sexual harassment cases are used to discredit other marketplace regulations as patronizing exercises in victimism.

A little to the left of the IWF, arguing more judiciously that structural barriers to equality have been significantly eroded, if not eliminated, is the Women's Freedom Network, another Washington-based organization of affluent white professional women, united by

The IWF is
the women's
auxiliary of the
conservative
elite.

disdain for what its president Rita Simon calls "extremist, ideological feminism," (though it's hard to imagine how feminism or any political movement might exist bereft of ideology). Boasting a board of directors that includes Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, political scientist Jean Bethke Elshtain, and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, WFN can hardly be accused of denigrating women's roles outside the home; and, unlike the unequivocally antifeminist Independent Women's Forum, the Women's Freedom Network purports to offer a moderate, alternative feminism.

According to Simon, WFN believes in the "full participation of women in every area of American life," and "celebrates" women's achievements, as do all feminists, at least rhetorically. What distinguishes WFN philosophically from mainstream feminist groups is a highly individualistic approach to equality, which disavows affirmative action, and a relatively sanguine view of relations between the sexes. Like IWF, the Women's Freedom Network tends to minimize the problems of sexual violence, expressing particular contempt for protests of date rape and sexual harassment, without making a serious effort to understand the reality of sexual violence and intimidation and the intensity of women's concerns, particularly in an age of AIDS, or to distinguish between meritorious and frivolous claims.

FREE WOMEN IN FREE MARKETS

The superiority of free markets was an underlying theme of a 1994 conference sponsored by the Women's Freedom Network. At a session on "Women and Economics," panelists argued that (1) women were close to achieving workplace parity with men; (2) free markets are good for women; and (3) any apparent inequities between the sexes reflect the natural preferences of women, not prejudice. Sears Roebuck successfully made this argument in a 1986 case charging it with excluding women from higher-paying sales jobs. Sears claimed that women tended to choose lower-pay-

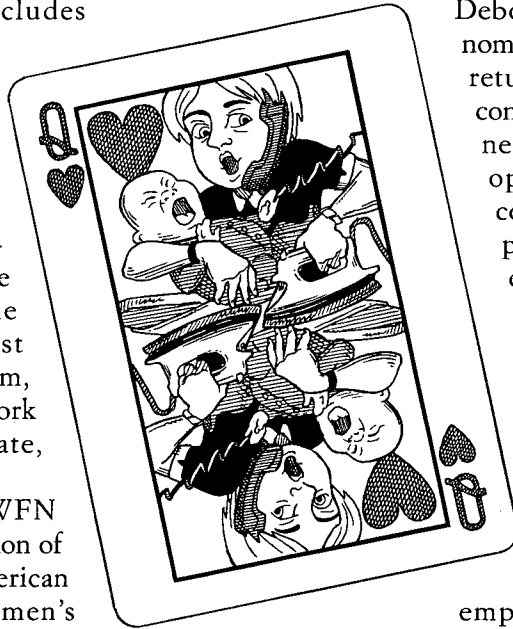
ing, noncommissioned sales work because it was less competitive than commissioned sales.

Arguing that workplace regulations limited workers' freedom to contract, Deborah Walker, professor of economics at Loyola University, urged a return to the days when working conditions were simply not the business of government. Equality of opportunity entails freedom of contract, she argued. For example, a woman should be free to enter into an employment contract that prohibits her from getting pregnant for three years: Individual contract rights like this would offer ambitious women freedom of choice and facilitate their rise.

It was unreasonable and counterproductive for women to demand that employers accommodate the demands of family life, Walker explained. Family leave legislation would encourage discrimination against women of childbearing age (as if the absence of family leave policies has no discriminatory effect). Besides, business is not in business to provide day care, she stressed, and women ought to be sensitive to the bottom line. Walker didn't deny that discrimination exists, but she offered a familiar rationale for not regulating it: A free market will cure discrimination because discrimination is costly, she asserted, without even wondering if, or why, the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting race and sex discrimination in the workplace was necessary.

Women also need to value entrepreneurship, Walker stressed: "Making money is a socially responsible goal. I can't think of a more socially responsible group than entrepreneurs." Walker urged women to demand lower taxes and less regulation, because they create opportunities for entrepreneurship.

This was less an example of revisionist feminism than standard Chicago-school economics, expounded by a female. At the close of the panel I asked Walker to elaborate on her freedom of contract argument. Should we repeal minimum-wage, maximum-hour, and occupational health and safety laws? Yes, she said quite forthrightly: People should be free to perform hazardous jobs for a lot



of money. Presumably she also supports their right to perform hazardous jobs for little money, as many workers do.

Rita Simon, the president of the Women's Freedom Network, tapped me on the shoulder and assured me that Deborah Walker was not speaking for everyone in the organization, pointing out that members such as Jean Bethke Elshtain and Elizabeth Fox Genovese did not share Walker's views. Still, no contrary views on workers' rights were presented. This was also about the only panel on women and economics I've ever attended that did not even mention welfare or the problems of low-income women. WFN's intended audience was clear—middle- and upper-middle-class white pro-

Feminism,
the IWF
warns, will
return
women to
whiny
dependency.

fessional women who have a chance of prospering individually in an unregulated market, though probably not as good a chance as some believe.

Feminism is, from this perspective, an incidental target of conservatives, some of whom, like P.J. O'Rourke, ridicule even the Americans With Disabilities Act as an exercise in vic-

timology—as if providing disabled people with access to jobs so that they can be self-supporting is somehow more patronizing than consigning them to reliance on telethons. A group like the Women's Freedom Network is antifeminist only to the extent that feminism is identified with a belief in the power and responsibility of government to police capitalism and address social ills. Successful professional women can feel at home with its philosophy because it is not antiwoman so much as antigovernment, when the power of government is directed toward social welfare.

Still, if WFN is not a liberal feminist group (given its general hostility to affirmative action and other marketplace controls), dismissing it as antifeminist is historically inaccurate. Unlike the Independent Women's Forum, it does represent, in part, a traditional strain of feminism that has focused on expanding individual opportunity, in the belief that the sexes can and should compete as equals in the marketplace. For some women com-

mitted to expanding social welfare programs, ending sexual violence, or foisting spiritual enlightenment and a female-identified ethic of caring upon the world, female professionalism is only one part of feminism; but for others it is nearly the whole of it. Adopting a professional identity means discarding an identity based primarily on sex, defining yourself not as a female astronaut but an astronaut who happens to be female.

DIFFERENT VOICES

The battle to define feminism in the 1990s revolves around familiar conflicts. Are women variable individuals, who may differ as much from each other in temperament, intelligence, ability, and ideology as they differ from men? Or are women members of a female collectivity, who share natural sexual vulnerabilities, a primary role in child rearing, relational skills, and particular moral sensibilities (that translate into political preferences)? There are liberal and conservative versions of both views.

In campaigns for individual rights and sexual freedom, such as voting rights and birth control, most feminists have naturally inclined toward the liberal individualism that made all men equal under law—although suffragists also relied on a belief in common female consciousness, arguing that once enfranchised, women would purify government. In crusades to accommodate wage-earning mothers and protect women from sexual violence and exploitation, feminists have generally adopted a collective view of womankind.

Tension between individualism and sexual solidarity, between rejecting and embracing sex as a predictor of character, competence, or behavior, has always plagued and enlivened the women's movement. Individualism and a belief in strict, sex-neutral equality that eschews compensatory treatment of women spawned the first campaigns for an equal rights amendment, proposed by the National Woman's Party in 1923 and vehemently opposed by feminist advocates of protective labor laws. Individualism and the drive for sex-neutral laws shaped no-fault divorce and the reform of traditional alimony laws, now assailed by many feminists for ignoring women's economic vulnerability and the primacy of their reproductive roles. Nineteenth-century feminists were similarly divided over divorce reform: Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a passionate advocate of no-fault divorce,

which was passionately opposed by Lucy Stone, who regarded it as a license for men to leave their wives. Individualism fuels the feminist defense of sexual freedom, including the freedom to read or view pornography, blamed by other feminists for sexual violence.

Alternating between individual and collective views of women, feminism can seem confusing. Internal, ideological inconsistencies recently surfaced in the controversy involving the Virginia Military Institute. Integration of the military academy was advocated by liberal feminists who argued, from an individualist perspective, that VMI's exclusionary admission policies were based on stereotypes of femininity and the assumption that women were not suited to the school's "adversative" training. Yet many of these same feminists support single-sex education, based on the same collectivist assumptions about women's learning styles invoked in defense of VMI. Feminists often protest the competitive, "male" ethos of many coed classrooms, insisting that it effectively discriminates against women. As neo-feminist Cathy Young of the Women's Freedom Network has pointed out, law professor Lani Guinier's charge that the Socratic method used in the nation's law schools is inhospitable to women was essentially no different from VMI's claim that adversative training was essentially male.

Postfeminists are plagued with similar contradictions. The Independent Women's Forum, which presents itself as a bastion of female individualism, protesting affirmative action because it confers group benefits on women, opposed the integration of VMI. As a group, women have particular developmental needs that differ from those of men, an IWF publication explains in supporting the plan offered by the state of Virginia to set up a separate leadership school for women. The new school would have respected women's supposed penchant for cooperation and focused on such issues as building self-esteem. Without a trace of irony, or self-awareness, the antifeminist, rugged individualist IWF endorses Victorian ideals of sex and gender difference

(and feminine weakness) at the heart of the "victim" feminism.

The same sex stereotypes thought to justify all-male military academies, not to mention an all-male military, long justified the unequal treatment of men and women under law, and virtually mandated feminine dependency, which until recent history was considered perfectly natural. A contrary view of women as diverse human beings, not icons of femininity, was at the heart of the drive for sex-neutral laws led by Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the 1970s. As head of the ACLU Women's Rights Project, Ginsburg successfully challenged laws that conferred different privileges and disadvantages on men and women, based on assumptions about their different natures and roles. A wide range of laws governing family life, employment, social security, and civic responsibilities such as jury service, treated men categorically as breadwinners and

women as homemakers.

Women should be treated as individuals, not fungible members of the female sex, equal rights feminists like Ginsburg argued—and you'd expect any group concerned with women's independence to agree. Stereotypes about masculinity and femininity are not legitimate bases for the allocation of rights and resources, Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg has confirmed, some 20 years later, ordering VMI to admit women.

In recent years, feminism has focused on protecting or accommodating women as a group. But as the VMI case showed, the wom-

en's movement will always bear the birthmark of the liberal individualism that the right-leaning Women's Freedom Network claims to represent. Women are "rational creatures," Mary Wollstonecraft stressed some 200 years ago, exhorting each of us to "obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex." Or, as the first American women's rights advocates put it in their 1948 Declaration at Seneca Falls, the sexes were "invested by the Creator with the same capabilities and the same responsibility for their exercise." Calling for the liberation of women from dependence on men, feminists were condemned, predictably, for denying or



perverting their own nature and violating a social order divinely ordained.

It is a familiar irony of history: Women's rights advocates were once attacked for demanding independence; feminists are now accused of discarding it and encouraging women to seek special treatment instead. In part, the feminist movement fell victim to its limited success. Feminists succeeded in greatly expanding women's rights during the 1960s and '70s, and as their focus shifted from achieving legal equality to combating social inequality during the Reagan years, they began to stress natural sexual solidarity and women's "different voice"—different "ways of knowing," different sexual and emotional needs, economic disadvantages, and commitment to family life.

This was not mere nostalgia for femininity. The retreat from civil rights and social welfare programs during the 1980s was felt keenly by women who had not as a group achieved economic parity. As reports on the feminization of poverty made clear, women were in fact being victimized by the failure of public policies to address continuing discrimination and resistance to reforming gender roles. And, despite new attention paid to domestic abuse and changes in the prosecution of rape cases, sexual violence was unabated. Meanwhile identity politics was on the rise, exacerbating a tendency of feminists to promote supposedly progressive visions of the eternal feminine.

So it's not surprising that since the 1980s, the most popular strains of feminism have been shaped by a belief in femininity, which contributed to the portrayal of women as a weaker sex, more readily victimized than men. In part, politics and culture were to blame for actual economic and sexual vulnerabilities to which feminist "victimism" responded. And in part, some feminists had themselves to blame for exaggerating women's weaknesses.

The embrace of popular therapeutic notions of victimization exemplified in the recovery movement and a preoccupation with self-esteem that borders on self-parody revived old notions of women's

fragility. The adoption of Victorian feminist demands to protect women from men has been particularly evident in the sexuality debates, as critics right and left (myself included) have frequently observed. Efforts to censor pornography, to define harassment subjectively—so that it includes speech considered offensive by the self-identified victim—and to define rape so broadly that it blurs the line between confusion and coercion (or fails to acknowledge that a line exists) fueled what are by now familiar charges of victimism.

Feminist orthodoxies about sex and sexual misconduct have been most unforgiving. (Reviewing the works of Catharine MacKinnon you get the sense that feminists divide into two camps—true feminists and feminists who disagree with her.)

The development of post-modern, feminist jurisprudence, elevating subjective individual perceptions and denying even the possibility of formulating fair, relatively objective standards of law, exacerbated a tendency to side reflexively with self-identified victims. In one dominant

feminist view, if a woman

felt raped, she *was* raped; if she felt offended or abused by a colleague's behavior in the workplace she was, by definition, harassed. Casualties of this extremism included, on one side, respect for the due process rights of accused rapists and harassers and, on the other, sympathy for the claim that many women continue to be victimized by harassment and rape, according to relatively objective notions of reality.

The excesses of feminist orthodoxies had much more effect on culture than law (although they did influence disciplinary proceedings in universities and some workplaces). Raising the alarm about sexual correctness and an epidemic of harassment and rape cases, critics on the right were as overwrought as the feminists they derided for portraying all women as the victims of sexual terrorism. Still, the feminist attraction to victimhood demanded correction. Self-criticism, however, was generally conducted in private. Some women didn't want to be vilified as antifeminist by their sisters, and



some were reluctant to lend any credibility to critics on the right. In this highly polarized debate, "truth" was presented as an absolute, as if every allegation of harassment and date rape were valid or none were. It became extremely difficult to stake out a feminist middle ground acknowledging the problems of sexual violence and intimidation without exaggerating them.

Of course, sexual harassment has functioned as a subtle and very effective form of sexual discrimination ever since women entered the workforce. Exposing and explaining the dynamics of harassment and forcing regulation of it has been an important achievement of contemporary feminism. But it has not come without costs. Defining harassment between adult men and women in a society that values free speech and is beset with countervailing strains of sexual permissiveness and puritanism is not as simple as feminist rhetoric is apt to suggest. But if some feminists have been guilty of assuming that virtually all women are victimized by culture and law, their critics on the right categorically deny that sexism makes victims of any women at all.

Right-wing attacks on feminism, however, were respectfully received by the media, in part because they were advanced by professional women, whose own success seemed to certify that equality had arrived. Susan Faludi is making a habit of exposing the antifeminist biases of her right-leaning putative sisters, deriding Katie Roiphe, Camille Paglia, and Christina Hoff Sommers along with the members of the Independent Women's Forum and the Women's Freedom Network as "faux feminists," promoted by an antifeminist press: We are not witnessing the birth of a legitimate political movement but a "media assisted invasion of the body of the women's movement: the Invasion of the Feminist Snatchers, intent on repopulating the ranks with Pod Feminists," Faludi wrote in a 1995 article in *Ms.*

It's easy to sympathize with Faludi's outrage: The media paid considerable attention to incendiary, self-proclaimed feminists, like Paglia, whose knowledge of the women's movement and women's history was only slightly less limited than the feminist sympathies of right-wing males who promoted her. But not all of feminism's new female critics were simply antifeminist self-promoters. Some, like many women attracted to groups like the Women's Freedom Network, represented historic feminist

points of view.

Twenty-four-year-old Katie Roiphe, for example, was vehemently condemned for debunking conventional feminist wisdom about an epidemic of date rape. *The Morning After* was a young, injudicious book that showed little appreciation for perfectly rational fears of sexual violence—fears that are bound to make many of us at least a little irrational. But it was not antifeminist. The view of women as sexually competent and responsible for their own behavior, which underlies Roiphe's critique and similar feminist pleas for sexual freedom, is basic to modern feminism, just as puritanism was basic to the nineteenth-century women's movement.

Feminism is a diverse and complicated movement that is often at odds with itself. Categorically dismissing all the criticisms raised by WFN as antifeminist, and considering all the women attracted to them faux feminists, ignores historic fault lines within the women's movement. It also distracts us from the groups' overriding goal—or the goal of their funders—of dismantling government regulation of the marketplace.

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WOMEN LIBERTARIANS

The drive for free markets, not hostility toward women, is what underlies neo-feminism's exclusive emphasis on individualism. The trouble with the women's movement, according to Sommers, is its promotion of "gender consciousness"—encouraging women to see themselves as part of a group rather than as merely distinct individuals. Sommers, author of *Who Stole Feminism?*—an attack on political correctness in the academy and the veracity of feminist claims about sexual violence and sexism in general—has blamed victimism on something she calls "gender feminism" (a nonsensical term used to deride the view of women as a class or interest group).

When conservative women like Sommers say that they're feminists, they often mean that they believe in equal opportunity and their own capacity to succeed; they mean that they want to be treated as individuals and not members of a group. Individualism is an essential part of feminism; but a commitment to collectivism is also an important part—it's what makes for a movement. It reflects a recognition that despite differences between them, women constitute a political class.

If women functioned only as individuals, lacking any sense of female solidarity, there would have been no woman's movement. We would not have the vote, much less laws insuring equal opportunity in education or employment, which neo-feminists generally claim to support; we'd have no battered women's shelters and no laws against marital rape. Women like Christina Hoff Sommers would not be teaching philosophy. Little girls would not be playing soccer. The stupidest criticism leveled against feminism is that it suffers from gender or sex consciousness. You might as well criticize the civil rights movement for being conscious of race.

What betrays the neo-feminists in the end is their utter ignorance of political movements and the sense of community they require. Feminism thrives on its ability to balance the view of women as individuals with the understanding that they are part of a collective, with a common history of discrimination and some common political goals.

In fact, the persistence of sex consciousness is recognized, if not understood, by any pollster or politician concerned about a gender gap. In the fear or hope that female voters constitute a group, Bob Dole selected moderately pro-choice

Congresswoman Susan Molinari to deliver the keynote speech at the Republican Convention. In an effort to attract professional women alienated by the social conservatism of the right, conservative foundations support groups like the Independent Women's Forum and the Women's Freedom Network, for whom gender consciousness is strictly determined by class.

Historically, feminist notions of male and female roles have also been affected by class bias. But nineteenth-century progressives and women's rights activists, who remained attracted to the ideal of True Womanhood, extended it to some poor and working-class women at least. In theory, feminism can be reconciled with economic libertarianism but, in fact, it has always involved a commitment to social justice and an activist government.

Individualism occasionally suffers from this alliance. Feminists are sometimes at odds with civil libertarians, over pornography or the rights of accused rapists and harassers, partly because feminism's tradition of reliance on government is so much stronger than its mistrust of government. When neo-feminists protest the elevation of female solidarity over concern for fairness to individual males, they offer feminism a necessary corrective. But when they advocate "empowering individual women rather than the state and its bureaucracies," as the Women's Freedom Network mission statement puts it, they challenge the essential, historic quest for sexual justice. Given our history of sex discrimination and the crucial role played by government in dismantling it, laissez-faire feminism makes about as much sense as a pacifist military.

"Are there still structural barriers to equality?" I once asked Christina Hoff Sommers, after she delivered a speech excoriating "gender feminists" for portraying women as victims. It was impossible to know, she replied, because feminists have falsified statistics, exaggerating the obstacles to women's advancement. "So use your common sense," I suggested. (She'd said that she was merely trying to inject some common sense into feminist debates.) "You've been around for over 40 years. What does your common sense tell you about the persistence of institutionalized discrimination?" She had no response, nor could she articulate a vision of sexual justice. Like priests who have no opinions about the existence of God, neo-feminists have a tenuous claim to their pulpits. □

LIBERTY, COMMUNITY, AND THE NATIONAL IDEA

BY ALAN BRINKLEY

Nothing is so central to America's image of itself as the idea of individual liberty. It is, we believe, what spurred many of the first European settlers to leave their homelands and come to our shores. It drove the revolutionaries who broke with England and created a new nation. It shaped the Constitution and, above all, the Bill of Rights. And it has been, we claim, the defining characteristic of our democracy for more than two centuries.

It is true, of course, that rights and freedoms have been central to our history and basic to our political and social system. But they have not been the only force shaping our public world. At least equally important, through most of American history, has been the idea of community.

In our present political world, there is considerable anxiety about how successfully the idea of community has survived in the twentieth century and considerable criticism of the preoccupation with rights

that many critics claim has dominated (and distorted) both liberalism and conservatism in the postwar era. This is an old complaint. Americans have been lamenting the decline of community for centuries—since at least the seventeenth century, when Puritan clerics began delivering jeremiads lamenting the passing of the close-knit religious communities of the first years of English settlement. The laments about the decline of community today are less theological, but no less impassioned. Intellectual and popular discourse alike are filled with warnings that the core of our life as a nation is disappearing, that we will soon

find ourselves bereft of the institutional and cultural underpinnings of a healthy society.

A growing chorus of powerful voices has emerged in recent years—led by (among others) Michael Sandel, Robert Putnam, Alan Ehrenhalt, Michael Walzer, Benjamin Barber, Amitai Etzioni, along with a very large part of the political right—charging that the bonds of community in the United States are dangerously eroding; that the character of our civic life has changed in ways that often seem to accentuate individual, as opposed to community, loyalties; that we are in danger of becoming an atomized society unable to forge the social bonds capable of sustaining our

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shared life. Both liberalism and conservatism in our time, some communitarian critics claim, have often tended to elevate rights to so high a place in the lexicon of values that other, equally important, values have suffered. There is at least some truth in these claims.

THE INDIVIDUALIST STRAIN

American liberalism for most of the past 50 years has at times seemed wedded to the idea that individual rights are paramount and that only in exceptional cases can a national or community interest override them. Michael Sandel, for example, argues that liberals insist on government remaining neutral on questions of values and morality—on it playing no role in defining a good life or a good society, because any such definition would likely favor one group's values over those of another. Citizens are autonomous—independent selves who must define their own values and goals. And government's role is to create the kind of society in which every individual can live, as much as possible, as he or she chooses. Sandel is correct, in theory at least, that liberalism in our time has at times seemed firmly wedded to the ideas of individual autonomy and unfettered personal choice, and that some liberals have celebrated their marriage to that concept by pointing to dark alternatives—to the dangers inherent in more collective social orders. Indeed, to some liberal intellectuals, the idea of community has not only seemed less important than individual rights, but even a potential threat to them. They have embraced an argument made particularly clear more than 60 years ago by Reinhold Niebuhr in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. "Individual men," Niebuhr wrote,

may be moral. . . . They are endowed by nature with a measure of sympathy and consideration for their kind. . . . Their rational faculty prompts them to a sense of justice. . . . But all these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore

more unrestrained egotism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.

In other words, Niebuhr (and some more recent liberals) claim that liberty, and even morality, reside most effectively within the autonomous individual; the more the individual becomes embedded within a group (a "crowd," a "mass"), the more endangered liberty and morality become. It is on the basis of this strain—an often powerful strain—within liberalism that the communitarian critique is founded.

Much of American conservatism, despite its contempt for what liberals have done in the last half century, rests heavily on a similar set of beliefs. Many conservatives also attribute to liberty a value far higher than they attribute to any community or collective interest; they too see the collective as not just inferior to, but a threat to, personal freedom. Their definition of liberty rests much more heavily than the liberal definition on the idea of economic freedom: the commitment to an unregulated free market, the belief that economic freedom, as Friedrich Hayek wrote 50 years ago in *The Road to Serfdom*, is inseparable from all other notions of freedom because economic power "is the control of the means of all our ends." Where some liberals believe government must be neutral in its relationship to values, behavior, and social norms, many conservatives believe government must be neutral in terms of markets, economic institutions, and the distribution of personal wealth. Where some liberals fear the irrationality and immorality of the "mass," some conservatives fear the tyranny of the state.

This regime of rights and freedoms—a regime supported, in different ways, by elements in both political parties and by some of the most powerful political philosophies of the last half century—has culminated, its critics charge, in our present political moment: in a raging popular discontent with the public world, in a sense among many of our people that they have lost control of their lives, in a growing despair about the future, and in a belief that the institutions that have guided us through

The communitarian critique confuses an individualist strain with all of liberalism.

most of our history have somehow spent themselves. The public world as we have known it in our time, many have come to believe, seems to lack the resources to answer that cry. Society yearns, they claim, for something more than rights and freedom—for a sense of community capable of giving individual lives meaning, for the civic life that forms the basis for the liberty we cherish.

THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITARIANISM

The communitarian critique, as eloquent and compelling as it seems in the context of our present, unhappy public life, has serious shortcomings—both as a description of politics as it is and as a prescription for politics as it should be. It is not wholly clear, first of all, that the bonds of civic life have in fact eroded as thoroughly as some critics charge. The supposed erosion of what communitarians (and many others) call “civil society” and what Robert Putnam has called “social capital” is almost impossible to document. Many traditional institutions of civic life have indeed weakened or vanished, but many new ones have emerged to replace them—a process that has been continuous in American society for two centuries.

Nor is it clear that either liberalism or conservatism in our time have been as wholly wedded to the idea of rights as the critics claim. There are, in fact, countless examples of the ways in which both liberals and conservatives have, in fact, offered definitions of the “good life” and the “moral society,” definitions that go far beyond a simple endorsement of personal liberty. For liberals, a wide range of social policies—housing subsidies, highway building, environmental regulations, civil rights and affirmative action, public support for the arts, and others—do, in fact, express a vision of a “good life,” even if it is one that critics of liberalism may find insufficiently ennobling. Many liberals have gone further and endorsed ideas of national service, cooperative workplace structures, and other explicitly communitarian goals. Conservatives, too, have proposed visions of community based on a prescriptive moral agenda that proposes a wide range of behavioral norms rooted in a normative (and often religious) concept of how individuals and families should live and behave.

But the largest shortcoming of the communitarian argument is the way some of its advocates define community itself. Many (although certainly not all) contemporary communitarians consider communi-

ty inseparable from localism. It is the neighborhood church, PTA, Little League, Boy Scout chapter, Elks Club, or (to use Robert Putnam’s now famous example) bowling league that is the source of civic life. It is the local voluntary association—the sort of organization that Tocqueville argued was so characteristic of early nineteenth-century America—that makes it possible for individuals to embed themselves in a community. Some communitarians, to be sure, see a link between the local community and the nation. They see in local civic life a vehicle for creating habits of community interaction and social trust, out of which a larger political community can eventually emerge. But other communitarians—those on the right in particular—envision no such links. The threat to community, they claim, is not just excessive individualism; it is also excessive centralization. The “community” stands in opposition to the “nation” or the “government.” It is a defense against impersonal bureaucracies, against the state, against the larger world. And as such, they claim, it is part of a tradition deeply embedded in American history.

It is true, needless to say, that this localistic vision of community has deep roots in the American past—as the frequent evocations of Tocqueville by today’s communitarians make clear. Historians, and others, have spent several decades now exploring the tradition of what they call republicanism, a vision of society that emerged in the eighteenth century and survived (according to some, although not all, of its chroniclers) through the nineteenth and into the twentieth (in the form of various populist movements, in some areas of the labor movement, in some parts of the left, and even in parts of the communitarian right). The republican tradition (closely associated with, among others, Thomas Jefferson) places a high value on personal liberty, to be sure, but it situates liberty within the fabric of a relatively small and homogeneous community whose citizens operate according to a shared moral code and a respect for social norms.

What gives rights and freedoms meaning? Many liberals and libertarians would argue that their meaning is inherent, that they are themselves the foundation of our public world. But republicans would argue differently. Liberty has no meaning except in a social context; rights cannot be sustained unless

there is a civic life healthy enough to create a shared commitment to them. Communities create freedom; freedom does not create itself. But in order to create freedom, communities also create obligations—obligations to honor certain common values, to respect certain institutions, to accept some common definition of what is good. We cannot hope to be truly free, according to the tradition of republicanism, unless we identify with and share in the governance of the political community upon which our freedom depends. And we can only do so, many republicans have argued throughout American history, if the community remains small enough that individuals can realistically expect to exercise some power within it.

The historian and social critic Christopher Lasch, in one of his last books, *The True and Only Heaven*, drew particular attention to today's close-knit, ethnically homogeneous, working-class communities as examples of healthy, vibrant societies. Lasch was deeply disheartened by the condition of modern middle-class life—by what he considered its heedless materialism, its resistance to social bonds, its rejection of obligation to family and neighborhood, its isolation of individuals into self-regarding, narcissistic beings. The strong Italian or Irish or Jewish or other ethnic neighborhoods of many American cities, with their strong family and community bonds, seemed to him a model for what the rest of society might become. And it is true that there is much to admire in the close and enduring ties of family and church and neighborhood, in the sense of mutual obligation, that characterize many such communities. A healthy society depends on strong families, vibrant neighborhoods, healthy schools, churches, and fraternal societies—thriving patterns of local, personal association. Those things are the foundations of community. Without them, the forces in modern society that isolate individuals would be impossible to withstand.

But Lasch's example, although he never said so, also reveals the problem of basing our hopes for community entirely on local, family-centered, and neighborhood-centered structures. The United States is a vast nation of remarkable diversity, and its most difficult dilemma throughout its history

has been finding a way for so many different kinds of people, and so many different kinds of communities, to live together peacefully and productively. That dilemma has become even more perplexing in the twentieth century, as a modern industrial economy and a pervasive mass culture have made it virtually impossible for any group to live in complete isolation. A purely local vision of community is,

today at least, a prescription not for harmony, but for balkanization and conflict. The tight-knit ethnic communities Christopher Lasch celebrates may have many virtues, but they can also be, and have often been, places where bigotry flourishes and inter-racial violence often erupts. Other kinds of insular communities seem even more hostile to any notion of a stable, tolerant soci-

ety: the gated, affluent communities that are now spreading across our landscape, based on an understandable fear of crime, to be sure, but an ominous sign of the fragmentation of our nation; the armed cults and militias, which have become visible to us only relatively recently, which set themselves up in opposition (at times violent opposition) to government and mainstream society; some, although by no means all, of the militant Christian communities, which attempt to impose a rigid religious orthodoxy on unwilling neighbors; and many others.

BEYOND PAROCHIAL COMMUNITY

But there is also a larger vision of community, with equally strong roots in American history. The kind of community that forms the basis of a stable, healthy society—particularly a society as vast and diverse as ours—transcends parochialism. It rests at least as much on a concept of the nation as it does on the concept of the neighborhood, or the town, or the region. This idea of a national community is, in fact, among the oldest and most powerful in our history—at least as old and as powerful as the republican ideal with which it sometimes seems, at least, to compete. It is the source of our Constitution and the basis of the most powerful political traditions of the first century of our nation's existence.

The framers of the Constitution wanted, of course, to protect liberty. They wanted to create a

Liberals have
offered visions of the
good life that go
beyond individual
liberty.

form of government that would ensure the rights of the individual. But they understood, too, that liberty could only be secure in a large political community, a genuine nation. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia (according to James Madison's diaries), Alexander Hamilton "confessed that he was much discouraged by the amazing extent of the Country in expecting the desired blessings from any general sovereignty that could be substituted." How, he asked, could a national government effectively unite such a vast and diverse nation? Hamilton was expressing a widely shared fear, expressed most prominently by the French political theorist Montesquieu and widely understood throughout the English-speaking world. Popular government, Montesquieu warned, could not function within a large country; such a government would be torn apart by "a thousand private views" and would lead to efforts by ambitious leaders to produce despotism.

But James Madison offered an answer to Hamilton and Montesquieu—an answer that Hamilton ultimately embraced and that became the heart of the American national idea. The size and diversity of the nation, Madison wrote in *The Federalist* No. 10, was in fact the best hope for stability. The greatest danger to a healthy society, Madison argued, was "faction": "a number of citizens . . . who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." How could a society avoid the plague of faction? There were two ways, Madison argued. One was "removing the causes of faction," a dangerous course because it would involve either destroying liberty or creating an enforced uniformity of views—both of which would be remedies "worse than the disease." The other was "controlling [the] effects" of faction. And to do that, he claimed, required a large political community in

which every faction, no matter how large, would have to deal with, and accommodate, others. "A pure Democracy," Madison wrote, "by which I mean, a Society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the Government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction." The solution to faction lay in an extensive republic, spanning a vast and diverse country, where no one faction could prevail.

George Washington, in his 1796 Farewell Address (largely written by Hamilton), stressed the importance of a strong national union as the framework for a workable national community. The union was not simply a structure within which factions could do battle; nor was it simply a strong central government capable of tempering local passions; it was a state of mind—a commitment of citizens to each other and to a common sense of purpose and obligation, "an indissoluble community of interest as one nation." Washington, Madison, Hamilton, and the other founders of our nation had great respect for the small communities that bound the lives of most citizens. But they understood, too, that for America to survive and flourish, there had to be a larger idea of community as well, one that embraced the nation.

Their idea was not uncontested. Jefferson for a time offered a partial dissent, in his vision of a small agrarian republic united by the commonality

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of interest and sentiment of its citizens rather than by the power of a strong national political community; but Jefferson, as president, gradually moved away from his agrarian vision and presided over a significant increase in both the extent and the unity of the nation. A more serious challenge came in the mid-nineteenth century from the American South. "The very idea of an American People, as constituting a single community, is a mere chimera," John C. Calhoun once said. "Such a community never for a moment existed." The Civil War was, among other things, a battle to defeat Calhoun's idea. Daniel Webster based his famous defense of the Union on the idea that the survival of liberty depended on the survival of a national community—"Liberty and Union, one and inseparable, now and forever." There was, he insisted, a "common good" that transcended local interests, a partnership based in part on economic interest but also in part on spiritual union. One of the great admirers of Webster's words was Abraham Lincoln.

COMMUNITY AND NATION

The concept of a national community met a challenge again in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the rise of large-scale industrial capitalism and the enormous social and economic dislocations that accompanied it. Laissez-faire capitalism—and such intellectual rationales for it as social Darwinism—celebrated individual initiative, the "survival of the fittest," and the value of acquisitive individualism as the basis of society. Everyone ultimately benefited from the achievements of talented, successful people, the social Darwinists claimed. Constraining their activities in the interests of the "community" would be to retard the healthy progress of society.

The populists offered one answer to laissez-faire. Economic growth that disempowered individuals and eroded communities was, they insisted, both unfair and unnecessary. The economy could grow and prosper in a more humane way, through a network of smaller-scale institutions rooted in communities; but it could also grow and prosper through the intervention of a powerful national government holding industrialists, financiers, and in the end everyone to a higher standard than maximizing profit. The local communities they were fighting to preserve could not survive, the populists believed, without a national community capable of restraining private power and protecting the inter-

ests of ordinary people. (The "populism" of our own time, which sees the only danger in society in a powerful national government, is a radical perversion of the original populist idea, which rested in part on the older republican notion of a "moral community" but that also embraced the more modern notion of a strong national government that defended individuals and communities from the great predatory organizations that had grown up to threaten them.)

Another response to laissez-faire came from progressive reformers, among them Theodore Roosevelt, a great champion of industrial growth and economic progress, but also a staunch defender of the idea of "the solidarity, the essential unity of our [national community]." Great forces had been unleashed in the modern world, Roosevelt recognized, forces that had enormous capacity to do good, to create progress. But that progress would be for naught if it came at the cost of the dignity of individuals and the vitality of communities. Individuals and localistic communities were powerless by themselves to withstand the assaults of modern, large-scale organizations. Only a national community—embodied, Roosevelt believed, in a vigorous democratic state—would make it possible for local communities, and the individual liberty dependent on them, to survive. "I believe in corporations," Roosevelt once said. "They are indispensable instruments of our modern civilization; but I believe that they should be so supervised and so regulated that they shall act for the interest of the community as a whole." The health of the nation depended on the "capacity to subordinate the interests of the individual to the interests of the community," and the realization of that capacity depended on national standards and national power.

The New Deal is remembered, and often excoriated, today as the source of contemporary liberalism, and its supposed preoccupation with rights and entitlements. And the New Deal did, of course, contribute in critical ways to the creation of the rights-based liberalism that has been so much in evidence in the last half century. But the New Deal was also deeply committed to the concept of community—both to the restoration of local communities and to the strengthening of the national community in which those smaller units are embedded. From the beginning of his administra-

tion, Franklin Roosevelt's rhetoric was suffused with images of nationhood, of interdependence, of community. In his first inaugural address, he never once used the words liberty, individual, or equality. The early New Deal was, above all else, an effort to find concepts of community capable of transcending the bitter struggles dividing groups in the economy and the society from one another. The New Deal's first major effort at economic reform, the National Recovery Administration, tried (although it ultimately failed) to create what New Dealers called "cooperative action among trade groups," to define a "community of interest" that would draw together capital, labor, government, and the consumer. It was an effort to temper the brutality of the industrial economy, to insist on national standards of "community interest" amid the brutal competitive struggle of capitalism.

Many of those impulses ultimately faded from New Deal thought, and others—which focused more intently on rights and entitlements—emerged to replace them, so that postwar liberalism had a weaker connection with the idea of community than most of the progressive and reform traditions that preceded it. Postwar conservatism, too, in its preoccupation with delegitimizing the New Deal and opposing communism, elevated the idea of liberty to a more central place than it had ever occupied before. The present popular discontent with the public world may or may not be a result of a real decline in community sentiment and community institutions. But that discontent has often taken the form of a lament for the passing of community and a yearning for its revival; and many of those who make such laments have found contemporary political discourse barren of language and ideas capable of satisfying them. The arguments of the communitarians of both the right and the left in recent years have emerged in response to that broad frustration.

These small chapters in the history of ideas of community in America, therefore, resonate with questions that preoccupy our own time. History teaches us, we hear from many quarters (including the halls of Congress and the bench of the Supreme Court), that a strong national community, and a powerful national government, are artificial accretions of modern liberalism, incompatible with our traditions and our values. But history teaches us no such thing. Our tradi-

tions and our values have never been fixed or uniform and they have always included—in addition to a strong commitment to individual rights and personal freedoms—a powerful sense of the value of community and the importance of nation.

The political world of today is preoccupied with divisions and oppositions: the government versus the market; the national versus the local; the public versus the private; liberty versus community. The rhetoric of our time asks us to choose among these conflicting values and ideas—to accept that we can have one but not the other. But the history of our nation's political traditions suggests that these divisions are entirely artificial, that it is unnecessary to choose. Indeed, not just unnecessary, but destructive. We need a vigorous government and a healthy market. We need strong national institutions and strong local ones. We need a healthy public world and a healthy private one. Above all, perhaps, we need—to paraphrase Webster—liberty and community; for neither is sustainable without the other. □

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EYES ON THE STREET

COMMUNITY POLICING IN CHICAGO

BY JONATHAN EIG

Officer Patti Black is driving down Lowe Street on a gorgeous day in one of the nation's most dismal neighborhoods. The neighborhood is Englewood, the city is Chicago. In a small park on one side of Lowe Street, children armed with crab apples are playing war, chasing each other around the park, pausing to pick up more crab apples, then chasing each other again.

Across the street, however, a scream of terror rises from a row of federally subsidized apartments as Officer Black passes on routine patrol. A 17-year-old girl runs out of a building, blood dripping from her arm, and chases down the squad car. "My momma and my sister jumped me . . . and beat me . . . with a broom . . . and I'm pregnant," she says between gasps for air.

Officer Black, a decorated cop and a strong proponent of the city's new community policing initiative, gets out of her car to talk to the young woman. She calms the girl down, gets more details on the domestic crisis, and asks the teen to think about whether she might want to move out of the house. All in all, it's an unremarkable event, one that Black will almost forget to report at the end of her shift. But what happens to the officer next is much more informative and may reveal a good deal about why some criminal justice experts consider the model established by the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) to be the nation's best hope for reforming law enforcement policy.

While Black stands on the sidewalk, a 12-year-old girl circles her, playing with everything on the officer's belt but the gun and handcuffs. She slides Black's long, heavy flashlight out of its holster and carries it off to show friends. Officer Black, a tough-talking, sweet-faced 37-year-old, shows remarkable patience. When she's done with the injured 17-year-old, she steps away to talk to the girl with her flashlight, who, as Officer Black already knows, is one of seven women and children recently victimized by a rapist on Lowe Street.

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A few weeks earlier, Black had gathered an informal block meeting to tell residents that at least half a dozen women had been attacked by a masked, knife-toting man who had removed air conditioning units from windows and climbed into apartments while the occupants slept. A few days later, one of the women who attended the meeting called Black to identify the alleged rapist, a 16-year-old boy who lived on the block.

"Do you still want to come to court with me Friday?" Black asks the girl. "I really need you."

"I don't know," the girl giggles. "I feel bad for him."

Black, who by now knows not only the girl but also her family and neighbors, shores up the youngster's confidence and talks to others on the block about ensuring that the 12-year-old testifies. The officer wonders later whether she would have the same influence in the neighborhood were it not for community policing, which keeps her in the vicinity of Lowe Street so steadily that she has become almost as familiar as some of the local drug dealers. She wonders if she would have caught the rapist at all under the police department's old operating model, which emphasized arrests rather than intervention.

WHAT IS IT?

In the late 1960s, the federal government sponsored experiments encouraging police officers nationwide to spend more time in the communities they protected and served. The movement never caught on, but it did capture the interest of several important academics who continued to study and write about "neighborhood team policing," as they called it then. By the mid-1980s, a new generation of college-educated police chiefs had risen to power, and they began turning to what they had learned in college. At the time, crime rates were skyrocketing all over the country, cities were setting annual records for homicides, and politicians needed a new brand of public policy to offer frustrated residents. San Diego, Portland, Edmonton, and Newport News were among the first to implement versions of community policing, and before long it seemed as if every police chief in every city was trumpeting a neighborhood-oriented approach to the job.

Today, community policing is ubiquitous. Like welfare reform, everybody's got to have it, even if no one knows exactly what it is. The popular image is as oversimplified as a Norman Rockwell painting: Community policing means officers stay in one neighborhood, and maybe even get out of their cars to walk the beat. And instead of responding to 911 calls all the time, they listen to people's problems and try to solve them with common sense, creativity, and community service.

In fact, most cities that claim they have instituted this style of reform have made only halfhearted attempts, invoking the spirit without putting any muscle or money behind it, implementing it only sporadically, or sampling it in safely selected neighborhoods. True community policing remains for the most part an ideal: a system built from the bottom up in which preventive problemsolving becomes more important than making arrests, a lively partnership in which police take their orders not from headquarters but from local residents.

T rue community
policing requires
a makeover of city
government.

Effective community policing must be more than Dirty Harry suspended from the force and replaced by Andy Griffith. It requires not just new rhetoric but a wholesale change in police training and operations, a giant makeover of community service systems and a fundamental change in the way City Hall bureaucracies interact with police.

CHICAGO'S HOPE

In most big cities, the thought of such a revolution is preposterous. The overmatched and much-maligned Los Angeles Police Department might sooner have officers flying from one crime scene to another via personal jet packs. But in Chicago, city officials brag that they are closer than anyone to realizing the true vision of community policing. After a two-year pilot program in five neighborhoods, the program is up and running citywide, it is strongly backed by a well-entrenched mayor, and it is designed with a heavy emphasis on grassroots participation. It still isn't *Mayberry R.F.D.*, but it's not business as usual, either.

Community policing in Chicago means more than officers going on foot. When it works, officers get to know their beats and the people who live on them, and residents are encouraged to report not

only crime problems but also pressing community issues such as abandoned vehicles and neglected children. The police turn the complaints over to the appropriate city departments, and they expect their reports to be answered quickly and efficiently. Neighbors, for example, might (and often do) complain to police about abandoned buildings. After drug dealing and gang violence, it is one of the most commonly reported problems in many city neighborhoods. Mayor Richard M. Daley has reorganized large sections of his bureaucracy to help city agencies better interact with the police department. The police department now has a branch responsible for forwarding complaints about abandoned buildings to the city building department and dogging the department until demolition procedures begin. Bureaucrats in the building department know, presumably, that Chicago's powerful mayor considers these requests a priority. Police, city officials, and some residents say the system handles those sorts of everyday neighborhood concerns better than ever, and it is here that community policing has shown the most potential.

City officials believe this approach will make residents feel as if they can play a role in solving their neighborhoods' problems. The plan is so progressive, so grassroots, that some local disciples of Saul Alinsky are still a bit stunned to see stiff-necked Chicago backing it. If community policing truly works, some local believers say, its emphasis will be not on crime so much as neighborhood activism. Residents, organized around police beats and meeting monthly to discuss their problems, might very well ask police to look into a series of rapes or robberies, but they are more likely to discuss trash that needs picking up, abandoned cars that need towing, and youth who need activities to keep them off the streets. From there, the neighbors might go on to talk about neglected parks, meals for the elderly, and other concerns unrelated to law enforcement. Top police officials say they are willing to engage in this less-than-exciting work ("social work," as some skeptical beat officers sneer) because they believe it will cut crime and reduce fear over the long run, thus making their jobs easier.

To some, Chicago's community policing is the most progressive experiment in police reform in years and a model that might help liberals find an angle all their own on

crime and social order. But there's still ample cause for skepticism. While there is evidence suggesting that crime and fear of crime are declining around the city, and the statistics look especially good in the districts that pioneered community policing, even many CAPS supporters say it's too soon to declare the program a success.

Meanwhile, some cities—though not Chicago—have been forced to pull back from reforms because 911 response times fell while officer assignments focused more on neighborhood relations than on emergencies. And some criminal justice scholars worry that community policing could lead to widespread civil liberty abuses as officers, already overworked, and now taking on larger responsibilities, become so independent and so deeply familiar with their beats that they abuse their powers more frequently. Officers trained to strictly follow rules might respond poorly to a more casual approach, and they might interpret their new freedom as an invitation to take matters into their own hands. Before community policing can be declared an outright success as either a deterrent of crime or a facilitator for neighborhood social services, these problems must be addressed.

THE BEAT GOES ON

To get a sense of how community policing works, I interviewed beat cops and residents in two Chicago neighborhoods: Englewood and Rogers Park. Englewood, on the south side, is one of the city's poorest and most crime-infested neighborhoods, inhabited almost exclusively by African Americans; Rogers Park, at the city's northern edge, is a diverse area with dozens of ethnic groups, residents of almost every income tier, and far fewer violent crimes than Englewood.

The Chicago Police Department assigns officers to beats for a minimum of one year. Officer Black has been driving (and occasionally walking) the same grid in Englewood for three years now, and wherever her cruiser cruises, cries of "T-Bone" rise in the air. "Hey, T-Bone, what's up?" "Yo, T-Bone, how do you like my new bike?" She won the nickname because her last name, before her divorce, was Thibeault, which sounded enough like the steak to stick. Though she is white in a predominantly black part of town and a cop in an area where gangs dominate life, she has carved a relatively comfortable place for herself. Domestic disputes are more easily resolved and fights more easi-

ly avoided because neighbors know her. She works hard to remain in the favor of those on her beat, including those she has arrested time and time again.

For one thing, she rarely writes tickets. While we are out on patrol one night, a car rolls through a four-way stop sign without even pausing. The driver sees the police car, puts an upturned palm out his window and shouts, "Sorry, T-Bone!" Black just shakes her head. Another time, she spots a man who is wanted for a parole violation. He does not run when Black approaches. "You were supposed to pick me up yesterday," the man says, and the officer admits she forgot. The man doesn't want to start serving his sentence right now because he's not appropriately dressed, so he and Black agree that she will pick him up the next day. The officer is so familiar with the parolee and his family—and outstanding warrants are so common here—that Black is confident he'll keep his word. She understands that respect and goodwill benefit her more than force. Once, when a suspect resisted arrest and began punching her, neighborhood gang members rushed to her defense and helped subdue the man.

The cat-and-mouse game played nightly on Black's beat is an interesting one. The crack-selling gang members expect her to be around, and as a result they don't often keep drugs or weapons in their possession. Black knows this, so she watches but usually does not come down hard until she witnesses a drug deal or has information that one of the gang members has been involved in a crime. She does, however, demand that certain rules be followed, among them: Alleys must be kept clear of trash; loitering is forbidden in front of schools, businesses, churches or anywhere neighbors have complained; and gang members are not to spit on the ground ("It's a sign of disrespect," she says) when police drive by. Black says, and neighbors agree, that prostitution and drug dealing have slowed on her watch. Many abandoned buildings have been demolished and most of the abandoned cars now get quickly removed. She admits, however, that some of the

same problems have increased on adjoining beats where her fellow officers have not been so vigilant. As a result, it's impossible to say whether crack dealing or any other crime has really been reduced or if it's merely been pushed elsewhere. Overall crime rates are down slightly since the community policing pilot began three and a half years ago in

Englewood, but its status as the second deadliest neighborhood in Chicago has not changed. The Englewood neighborhood, 6.1 square miles with a population of 100,000, or roughly equal in size and population to Cambridge, Massachusetts, often endures five shootings in a single night. During the first eight months of 1996, 43 people were murdered, compared to 47 in the same period last year.

Black's neighborhood connections can be particularly helpful after a shooting. She'll frequently receive calls from witnesses willing to identify a perpetrator. But in many ways community policing in Englewood is not so dramatically different from traditional policing. Black spends little time working with the city bureaucracy on trash-filled alleys or abandoned buildings; most of that work is handled by civilian employees and desk officers in the department. She does attend monthly beat meetings, but most of her important contact with residents comes on the street during routine patrol, where an informant might ask to be frisked or handcuffed to avoid the appearance that he is freely cooperating. Black still spends most of her time driving, watching, and waiting, the same as always. The difference with community policing is that she is confined to a smaller area, and she knows who belongs there and who doesn't.

"Before, I'd be flying all over the district, from one end to the other," she said. "I think the quality of the work we do has improved because of the rapport we have with the people. We've solved a couple of murders this year because we knew who to talk to. If you're just a face, that won't happen."

BUILDING TRUST

In Chicago's Rogers Park, Officer Joe Cannon has also spent more time talking to the people on his beat and less time arresting them—and he, too, believes the investment in social contact has paid

Chicago's community policing program may be the city's most progressive police reform in years.

off. Unlike Officer Black, who attributed the successful identification of the Englewood rapist to her neighborhood connections, Cannon couldn't think of any dramatic examples in which community policing helped him solve or prevent a dramatic crime. But the 28-year veteran of the force is still persuaded that community policing is an improvement on the old response-based system. He appreciates the fact that his department no longer judges him solely on the number of arrests he makes and that it rewards him now for meeting with residents, reporting problems, and suggesting solutions. "Every day you go out there and you see people washing their cars or mowing their lawns or playing with their kids," he says. "If they see you and know you, they trust you." The officers who can't cope with the new, slower routine—and there are a few in his district—are assigned to response teams, which continue to handle the bulk of 911 calls. But most officers have adapted, and new recruits are more likely to embrace community-service-based policing because they're being trained to understand its principles. "We were all willing to give it a chance," he says. "We're police officers. We got into this work because we like working with people and we'd like to see things get better. If you can show us that this will make a difference, we'll do it."

Yet Cannon's experience illustrates one of the main challenges that must still be overcome: smoothing the relations between the community and the police. The same day I rode with Cannon, he attended a beat meeting at a small recreation center in Rogers Park. The turnout was poor, with only about a dozen residents compared to 15 police officers, and the residents were mostly white, unrepresentative of the neighborhood's diversity. Several members of the audience I spoke to had never heard of community policing prior to the meeting. A 46-year-old purchasing agent from the neighborhood told me he wanted to get involved sooner but was never informed about meeting times. One woman at the meeting asked officers to explain the difference between a beat and district; another asked whether she should use a whistle when she wants to summon police.

Police, not residents, led most of the meeting. They reported on areas seeing heavy gang activity and asked people who lived there to phone the dis-

trict and provide license plate numbers from suspicious vehicles. They also provided details on two rapes in the neighborhood and promised to distribute sketches of the suspects as soon as they could. After less than 30 minutes, the officers departed while residents continued discussing more specific concerns, such as graffiti and efforts to remove pay phones frequently used by drug dealers. Sonny Hersh, the resident who led the meeting after the officers left, remained optimistic. "The police were separated from the community for so long," he said. "They only saw the bad guys, not any of the good guys. I've seen a big difference with community policing. There are some older officers who didn't want to change, but for the most part they're a dying breed. I think most people see that it works. There's never enough police officers, unfortunately, but for what they have to work with, it's reasonably effective. The whole thing's evolving, but it does work."

DOES IT REDUCE CRIME?

Wesley Skogan, a professor at Northwestern University, has monitored CAPS since its inauguration in 1993 as a pilot program in five neighborhoods. The city of Chicago, according to Skogan, has always been strongly resistant to reform of any kind. But Skogan says Chicago, to the surprise of many, is one of the few cities attempting substantive reform in the organization of its police. Other cities have confined community policing to a select group of volunteer officers and kept the experiment small, so it wouldn't disrupt the larger organization. Even where the small-scale experiments worked, most cities had no plan to expand them.

Skogan names several keys to Chicago's success. First, the program was designed and implemented by City Hall, not the police department. Eight out of the top ten problems neighbors cited in beat meetings had nothing to do with crime, Skogan said. "Neighbors are concerned about a whole broad range of human service problems—trash, junked cars, abandoned buildings, speeding," he said. "In the past, the response would have been that those are not police problems. Now Chicago has organized its department so those are police problems."

Second, Mayor Daley has made the reform effort enough of a priority that his department heads know they had better cooperate with police and take care of the reported complaints. Skogan

BOWLING ALONE?

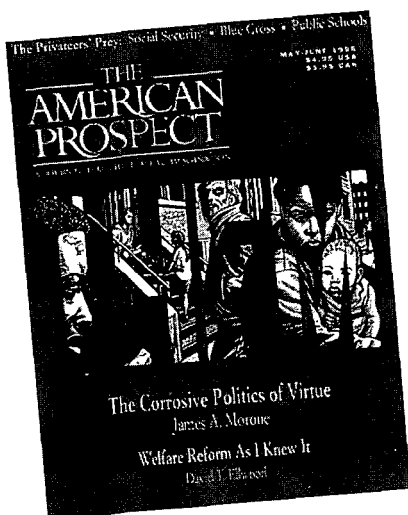


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says community policing failed in New York because that city had three mayors and five police chiefs in ten years. Almost every mayor in the country expressed interest in community policing five years ago because crime statistics were increasing and politicians needed new rhetoric to offer frustrated citizens. But only Chicago and a few other big cities, including Portland (Oregon) and San Diego, have had leadership willing to make the commitments of funds and institutional change required for successful community policing. In Chicago, the police department also avoided one of the problems of community policing by creating a separate rapid-response team to handle 911 calls so beat officers could concentrate their efforts on neighborhood services.

The bottom line, of course, is how much—if it all—community policing lowers crime rates. Last summer, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority published Skogan's evaluation of Chicago's pilot program. Skogan's study found that crime had dropped slightly in most of the neighborhoods under study, though it did not determine conclusively whether community policing had been the cause. Skogan asked 1,500 Chicagoans how community policing had affected them after its first full year of operation, and the results were mostly positive. Most residents said they had noticed more police activity. At the same time, they reported being stopped less often by police. In Englewood and Austin, residents said police had become less abusive while people in Morgan Park, Rogers Park, and Marquette noticed no change. In four out of the five neighborhoods surveyed, residents had grown more optimistic about police, saying the department had become more responsive to their concerns. In all five neighborhoods, residents reported a very small improvement in perceived crime fighting, but Skogan found similar results in two neighborhoods not operating under the CAPS model, leaving the question in doubt. For the most part, residents did say they felt safer.

But that still doesn't answer the question of whether crime—actual shootings, thefts, and assaults—were reduced because of community

policing. Once again, blanket summaries are impossible. In Marquette and Morgan Park, major crimes were reduced but no more dramatically than in non-CAPS neighborhoods. In Austin, Englewood, and Rogers Park, however, major crimes did drop more dramatically than in comparison neighborhoods, prompting Skogan to say that community policing might have been responsible. In Englewood and Austin, drug- and gang-related crimes declined significantly

while they increased in comparison neighborhoods. "This shows," Skogan said, "that if you mount a serious program, it can have an effect."

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Skogan's study also revealed a serious concern, however. He found a clear correlation between the effectiveness of citizen organizations and physical improvements in each neighborhood, suggesting that progress might be stunted in places where there is not a serious community outreach. He highlighted the problem by noting that less than a third of all residents in Englewood, Marquette, and Austin were even aware of the city's community policing program. In Rogers Park and Morgan Park, half of all residents knew about CAPS, but the percentage did not appear to be increasing over time. Skogan also noted that police were assuming leadership of some neighborhood beat meetings to the exclusion of residents, and that citizens and police "had very different ideas about problem solving." As one might expect, police emphasized police action to deal with neighborhood concerns while residents stressed community organization. Adversarial encounters between police and citizens occurred in four of the five pilot districts.

Meanwhile, Warren Friedman, executive director for the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, complained that his non-profit group was expected to lose its \$2-million-a-year city contract for organizing community members because city and police officials believed police could do the outreach themselves. Friedman insisted that Chicago's model worked because residents were trained in how to help police, and without that training community par-

Police in Chicago can point to falling crime rates and a growing sense of safety . . .

participation would disintegrate. "There's too much turnover in the community," he said. "You can't just do a onetime training and expect to have the capacity for partnership."

Friedman noted that cities had been experimenting with community policing for 15 years, but deep community participation had rarely been developed because cities didn't believe community organization was an important goal or expense. But without a strong and stable corps of volunteers communicating and working on their problems, police won't be nearly so effective. And the hope that these community organizations might grow and begin working to improve large patches of the social fabric will soon be forgotten.

Even the police department's top community policing officials admit that public relations and community outreach, particularly in non-English-speaking neighborhoods, have been the weakest links in their operational chain. Barbara McDonald, co-project manager for CAPS, says officers have been reluctant to embrace the marketing arm of their job. Chicago police have always had exemplary arrest rates, she said, and it never made residents feel any safer. Now police are learning that they need a broader approach to crime—preventing it as well as solving it—and that this approach won't work unless police and neighbors work in partnership. But McDonald insists the city can accomplish that without the ongoing support of Friedman's Alliance for Neighborhood Safety. Now that a tie has been established between the police and the residents, the department believes it can step up its own public relations efforts to strengthen that connection.

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS

David Bayley, dean of the School of Criminal Justice at the State University of New York at Albany, says Chicago's community policing experiment has been the most heavily scrutinized model in the country. And while the experiment has shown promise so far, there are still countless ways it might fail. For one thing, unmotivated officers might find it easier than ever to slack off now that the department affords them time to get to know the neighbors and work out creative solutions to

their problems. Out on patrol, they have fewer calls to answer and reduced accountability. Vigilante cops, meanwhile, might be more tempted to flout the rights of a perceived troublemaker if they feel they are working under less scrutiny and at the behest of community groups.

Bayley, the author of *Police For the Future*, says the ultimate success of community policing still depends on the outcome of a fight for the hearts and minds of police officers. In Houston and New York, the commitment never grew strong enough and the reforms collapsed. "This is really a very interesting moment in American policing and we're on the bubble in terms of where it's going to go," he says.

John DiIulio, Jr., professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University and director of the Center for Public Management at the Brookings Institution, remains skeptical of claims that community policing has helped bring down nationwide crime rates. To some extent, he says, community policing was oversold in the late 1980s, offered up as a way to provide more safety for less money as neighbors did much of the work for

... but the evidence
from different
neighborhoods remains
inconclusive.

police. But in truth, he says, community policing requires increased manpower and much more money. After all, a certain number of officers must still be assigned full-time to emergency response, homicide, juvenile crime, and all the other indispensable bureaus. In addition to that core, the department must establish a strong street presence with officers walking beats, visiting schools, interacting with social service agencies, and attending meetings. "The fact of the matter is that America has many fewer cops than we need to do community policing," he said. "We're already trying to do more with less. Now we want to do more and better with less, and it just doesn't work." Having said all that, DiIulio adds that he considers himself a "booster" of community policing, which he sees as a move in the right direction for law enforcement. "Marginal improvements are still improvements," he says.

A QUALIFIED SUCCESS

Chicago's 13,500 police officers have adapted to reform as well as could be expected. About 9,000

of those cops are members of the patrol division, and community policing for them has become an essential way of life because the police department has left them no choice. The city's residents, however, have not done so well. Most of the residents I interviewed, including those who had almost daily contact with police, had no idea that the department had undertaken a massive change in organizational behavior. They remained both uninformed and uninvolved—and in a system that relies on community participation, such a lack of communication might prove fatal. Neighborhood activists worry Chicago will revert to old-fashioned policing if community participation slips—and it seems far more likely to slip if the city closes its contract with the local nonprofit group that recruited, organized, and trained residents to get involved. In order for the reform to work, law-abiding residents must feel that there is a social movement afoot, that it's catching on, and that if they join it they might actually improve their neighborhoods. Criminals, in turn, have got to notice that police become much more effective when they have the eyes and ears of neighbors working for them.

Community policing has attracted many followers because liberals and conservatives can both stand up proudly in the name of public order. For conservatives, community policing represents individual responsibility and a blow against big government. For liberals, it symbolizes the deinstitutionalization of crime fighting in favor of a more humane system built on collective action. Though it's too soon to bet the precinct house, community policing can work for residents of the ghetto as well as the penthouse district. It can attack both crime and the roots of crime. Already, police in Chicago can proudly point to falling crime rates and a growing sense of safety in many neighborhoods. They can even argue that they have established a foundation for neighborhood participation that might eventually grow into a powerful web of organized citizen action. But unless residents become more aware and involved, Chicago's reform will begin to look like no reform at all. The community will disappear from community policing, and Chicago will be right back where it started, with cops chasing robbers and everyone else locking the doors and shutting the blinds. □

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MULTIMEDIA AND MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

BY SHIRLEY VEENEMA AND HOWARD GARDNER

Technology does not necessarily improve education. Take a simple innovation like the pencil: One can use it to write a superlative essay, to drum away the time, or to poke out someone's eye. The best television has educated thousands, while the daily network offerings dull the sensibilities of millions.

The same is true of interactive technology, which is getting so much ink these days: It could become a valuable education tool, but only if we use it to capitalize on our new understanding of how the human mind works. In this essay, we examine one particular example of interactive media, a CD-ROM about a Civil War battle, and how it takes advantage of the more complex view of intelligence that has emerged in recent decades.

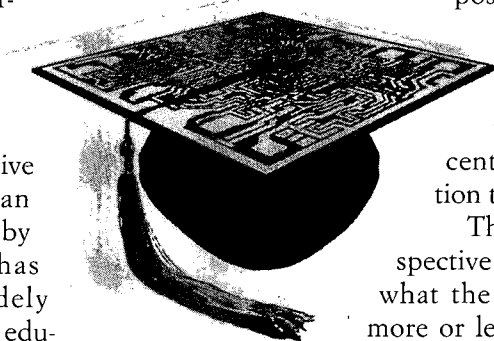
THE COGNITIVE REVOLUTION

Just 40 years ago, a new movement in science began to coalesce. Now termed cognitive science, this field seeks to integrate insights from several disciplines (including psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience) in order to put forth a more comprehensive understanding of the human mind. The approach fostered by the cognitive revolution has enormous, if not yet widely appreciated, implications for educational practice.

Even in science, one cannot have a revolution without an enemy. In the case of the cognitive revolution, there were two separate, though related, foes. The behaviorist perspective, as epitomized in

the work of B.F. Skinner, disdained any concern with the mind and its contents: All that mattered, from the behaviorist perspective, was that an organism perceived a stimulus and responded to it or that the organism acted in some way and was positively or negatively rewarded for so acting. In education, the apotheosis of the behaviorist perspective was the teaching machine, which remains central in computer-assisted instruction today.

The second antagonist, from the perspective of cognitivists, was the view that what the mind contains is intelligence—more or less of it. Individuals, according to this perspective, are born with a certain amount of intelligence, which for better or worse is essentially fixed. Few asked just what intelligence was or how it could be improved, increased, or transformed—indeed, the not entirely whimsical definition put forth by psychologists was that “intelligence is what the tests test.” The IQ



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test and its descendants, in such measures as the Scholastic Aptitude (now Assessment) Test, are the contemporary monument to this way of thinking.

In direct response to these entrenched perspectives, cognitivists argue that individuals do not just react to or perform in the world; they possess minds, and these minds contain mental representations—images, schemes, pictures, frames, languages, ideas, and the like. Some of the mental representations that individuals are born with or form at an early age prove enduring, but many other representations are created, transformed, or dissolved over time as the result of experiences and reflections upon those experiences. The mind, like a computer, processes and transforms information, and it is vital to understand the nature of this computing machinery—or, perhaps more aptly, these types of computing machinery.

While nearly all cognitivists would agree with this rough portrait, disputes abound about the nature of mental representations—about what they consist of, how they are expressed, how they relate to brain structures, and dozens of other issues. Fortunately, those of us interested in educational progress do not have to follow, let alone take sides, in these disputes. But two central ideas in the cognitivist's arsenal do have important implications for education.

TWO KEY COGNITIVE IDEAS

First of all, the mind is not comprised of a single representation or even a single language of representations. Rather, all individuals harbor numerous internal representations in their minds/brains. Some scholars speak of “modules of mind,” some of a “society of mind.” In our own work, we speak of the possession of multiple intelligences, which span the range from linguistic and logical intelligences (the usual foci of school work) to musical, naturalist, and personal intelligences.

According to multiple intelligences theory, not only do all individuals possess numerous mental representations and intellectual languages, but individuals also differ from one another in the forms of these representations, their relative strengths, and the ways in which (and ease with which) these rep-

resentations can be changed. There are at least eight discrete intelligences, and these intelligences constitute the ways in which individuals take in information, retain and manipulate that information, and demonstrate their understandings (and misunderstandings) to themselves and others. For example, in their understanding of the American Civil War, some individuals would favor a linguistic or narrative approach; others can be most easily reached through an artistic depiction; and still others might resonate to the personal dimension—how an internecine struggle affects neighbors and relatives and even generates ambivalence within one's own

self. While most individuals can use and appreciate these different perspectives and intelligences, over time each of us constructs our own amalgam of intelligences. Surprisingly (and counter to the claims of classical intelligence theory), strength or weakness in one area does not predict strength or weakness in other areas. And it is here that we encounter a seminal educational enigma.

Until now, most schools all over the world have been selection devices. These institutions have honored a certain kind of mind—ideally, one that combines language and logic—and tried to select individuals

who excel in these forms. In most schools individuals who favor other mental representations have received little honor.

The cognitivist's acknowledgment of different kinds of minds opens up enormous educational opportunities. If individuals do differ from one another and if we want to reach as many of them as possible, it makes little sense to treat everyone in a one-size-fits-all manner. Rather, we need to understand the specific minds involved in an educational encounter; and insofar as possible, we should base our education, including choices of technology, on that knowledge. And so, whether the course be history or physics or dance, we should try to teach individuals in ways that are consonant with, or that stretch, their current mental representations. Equally, we should give individuals the opportunity to exhibit their understandings by means of media and representations that make sense to them.

A second, quite surprising finding from cogni-

Applications
of the new
technologies
should provide
ways for a variety
of minds to
gain access to
knowledge.

tive research is that many early representations are extremely powerful and prove very difficult to change. It is as if, in the first years of life, the mind/brain becomes engraved with a certain scheme or frame by which it apprehends parts of experience. Often this scheme is seen as inadequate, and so educators inside and outside of school seek to transform the initial engraving. They may well feel that they have been successful in bringing about this transformation because the student has acquired more information, especially more facts. Yet, in a majority of cases, even good students at good schools do not really alter their representations. Indeed, when students are examined outside the scholastic context, they often give the same answers as students who have not even studied the subject matter or discipline in question. It is as if school consists of layers of powder that obscure rather than alter the initial engraving; and once that powder has blown away, the original representations have changed very little.

The “smoking gun” demonstration of robust mental representations occurs in physics. Even college students who have done well in written tests of mechanics actually hold on to understandings that are close to those offered by young school children. Their mental representations remain unschooled. Far from being restricted to physics, however, such misconceptions prove to be the rule across the curriculum. Whether the discipline is another science, mathematics, social studies, the humanities, or the arts, the first mental representations formed early in life turn out to be quite enduring. Only in those cases where students have been deeply involved with a topic over the course of months, or even years, is there convincing evidence that a new, better, and more adequate mental representation has come about.

If one wants to educate for genuine understanding, then, it is important to identify these early representations, appreciate their power, and confront them directly and repeatedly. Only then is it possible, in a reliable manner, to construct more adequate mental representations that themselves become robust and enduring.

As we have already emphasized, technologies alone cannot identify—let alone achieve—central educational goals. That is the task of the community, and it is hardly an easy or idle one. Stimulated by reflections on the

cognitive revolution, we propose here two important educational goals:

- the encouragement of deeper forms of understanding within and across the disciplines; and
- the “opening up” of the educational process to the widest spectrum of children, especially those who do not stand out in the traditionally canonical intelligences of language and logic.

WHY STUDY ANY PARTICULAR DISCIPLINE OR CONTENT?

Why study anything we teach in school? That is a question we must ask of all schooling, whether or not technologically enhanced. Some disciplines we readily deem worthy of attention. History, for example, offers us a laboratory for the study of past human experience in which to anchor our perceptions of contemporary life and the future. Why study the American Civil War or any particular battle? If, for example, we believe that knowledge of the American Civil War helps students to understand many of the tensions in our nation today, then particular battles warrant inclusion insofar as they advance understanding of specific aspects of the war or the study of history in general.

Traditionally, American history curricula include the battle fought at Sharpsburg, Maryland, on September 17, 1862, on account of its military and political significance. (Revealing the still charged nature of the encounter, even today northerners call this battle Antietam, while to southerners it remains the battle of Sharpsburg.) The facts are these: the Union army, under the command of

This article continues the series, “The New Media and Learning,” which opened with three articles in our July-August issue. All articles were originally presented at a conference sponsored by *The American Prospect* at the MIT Media Laboratory on June 4, 1996. Audiotapes of the presentations and discussion are available by calling 1-800-872-0162 or by ordering from our Web site at <http://epn.org/prospect.html>. The conference and articles were underwritten by a grant from the Spencer Foundation.

George B. McClellan, stalked Robert E. Lee's Confederate army as it moved to invade the North to get food and supplies. Both armies converged just outside the town of Sharpsburg and engaged in what turned out to be the worst one day of slaughter in American history. Although neither side could claim a decisive victory, Lee's first invasion of the North had failed, and no longer did it seem possible that England would recognize the Confederacy. Indeed, the very goals of the conflict changed when Lincoln seized the occasion to announce the Emancipation Proclamation, linking freedom for the slaves to the war goals.

Most textbooks present this material in such straightforward form. They may well provide an illustration or two. They generally convey the impression that there is a single, authoritative view of the battle, and, depending upon the background of the authors, often relate the battle from the perspective of either the North or the South. Assessments generally ask students to give back this information in factual form. Such a style of presentation and assessment is particularly appropriate for individuals who favor linguistic modes of learning. And such presentations rarely challenge the widespread assumption among students that there is a single objective account of a battle and that the Civil War featured a battle between Right and Wrong.

In what follows, we describe a CD-ROM design, *Antietam/Sharpsburg*, that transcends the usual textbook account. (Full disclosure: One of us, Shirley Veenema, co-designed the CD with James Sheldon.) First, *Antietam/Sharpsburg* recognizes and allows us to take advantage of the fact that intelligences of one student can differ from intelligences of other students in significant ways. And, second, it strives to inculcate deeper forms of understanding and attempts to deal directly with misconceptions and stereotypical habits of thought.

Our example reflects our belief that applications of the new technologies should provide ways for a variety of minds to gain access to knowledge, but

in no way are we jettisoning the major rationale for including history in a liberal education. Indeed, effective use of the technology reinforces both senses of the word *discipline*: Students should apprehend the major focus of thinking involved in a discipline like history and should do so in a steady, cumulative, and inherently disciplined way. Our example suggests ways in which new media might help students to approach an important historical event and to achieve deeper forms of understanding of that event.

CAN TECHNOLOGY ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING?

The CD-ROM *Antietam/Sharpsburg* uses accounts and representations from eyewitnesses to tell the story of the battle and offers a close-up view of the physical site and artifacts. Carefully selected primary source material in a variety of media highlights the idea that our knowledge of this battle comes from the representations left us by observers

who encoded their impressions in specific symbolic forms, such as the written journalism of the time, photographs, drawings, and telegraph and signal reports.

Different observers saw particular aspects of the battle. George W. Smalley, correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, started the day

near a cornfield where the fighting started and then moved on to several other sites, including General McClellan's headquarters. Felix Gregory de Fontaine, the correspondent for the *Charleston Courier*, identified his position as "upon the centre" where he could see little or nothing of the fight upon the left. Our contemporary narrative is constructed from the physical representations left us by observers like these. No single observer could see the whole battle and tell us the comprehensive story or give us one authoritative interpretation of what happened.

The idea that there exists a singular perspective is surprisingly hard to change. In fact, too often the seductive idea that there is a "right" view leads students to readily embrace the perspective of any perceived authority—teacher, textbook, or

New multimedia work may
enable ordinary students to gain an
understanding that may have been
accessible only in the extraordinary
classroom in years past.

“expert”—instead of realizing that students themselves need to weigh the evidence, evaluate sources, and come up with interpretations and justifications. In *Antietam/Sharpsburg*, an emphasis on multiple observers counters head-on the idea that there is a single interpretation and one “right” dramatic narrative.

Technologies like CD-ROM that are capable of presenting both pictorial and textual renderings of a battle from several perspectives can help to dissolve single-dimensional perspectives; they counter the bias toward a single narrative for history and good guy versus bad guy roles in a conflict. As we noted earlier in our discussion of cognitive representations, such stereotypical ways of thinking impede deeper understandings and prove hard to change. Consequently, they need to be addressed directly. The variety of approaches and media now available may, in fact, provide fertile opportunities to eradicate these and other common misconceptions that are formed early in a student’s life.

The reality of a battle is also far more complex than what we typically see in the movies, or what nineteenth-century audiences saw in paintings and prints that showed orderly ranks of soldiers responding to the directions of their leader. Often on horseback, the leader apparently knew exactly where they were to go and gallantly led forward his obedient and patriotic forces. In reality, battles are typically chaotic, life-and-death situations, fought by individuals pumped high with adrenaline. It is a rare post-battle account that can capture this complexity.

As in any battle, geography played a role at Sharpsburg: Cornfields offered no cover for troops battling back and forth; hills offered advantageous positions for Southern troops holding off Northern troops attempting to cross a stream; and an old roadway sunken from erosion and the weight of wagons provided a natural trench from which Confederates could train their rifles on Union troops. Moreover, troops on both sides had yet to accommodate their maneuvers to opponents’ newly advanced weaponry. Most strategic information was communicated by word of mouth or notes; signal flags and the telegraph carried news of the smoke-enshrouded conflict to George McClellan and the Union troops.

The multiple media of a technology like CD-ROM make possible complex renderings of an

event, but particular understandings need to be a design priority. For example, photographic sequences and text that “walk” the battlefield in *Antietam/Sharpsburg* are designed to help students understand the relationship of the geographic terrain to strategies and course of the battle. In decoding telegraph reports that convey a sense of just how hard it was to know what was going on during the battle, students may realize how difficult it was to communicate under fire, and why there were so many missteps and conflicting messages.

CAN TECHNOLOGY OPEN UP EDUCATION TO MORE STUDENTS?

What observers reported at Sharpsburg went far beyond sheer physical location. While we can’t know what any observer actually thought, the form of representation and symbol system used by each witness profiles a characteristic way of thinking. Reporters from the *New York Tribune* and the *Charleston Courier* used words to fashion strikingly different descriptions of events, actions, and personalities. Alfred Waud, the artist who did pencil and chalk sketches for *Harper’s Weekly*, drew aspects of the conflict in which he paid careful attention to the nuances of soldiers’ positions and facial expressions. The signal officers did more than just wave flags to encode messages; by the force and speed of their motions, they conveyed to those far away the pace and tension of the battle.

If we believe that the mind is neither singular nor revealed in a single language of representation, our use of technologies should reflect that understanding. Technologies like CD-ROM that include a variety of media may well be able to help more students form rich representations of an event and cultivate deeper understandings. However, it is unrealistic to expect this to happen by simply adding more information and more media. Instead, our authoring has to have the explicit goal of greater access for more students, and we need ways to assess what and how they have learned.

The guided paths in *Antietam/Sharpsburg* provide one example of what such authoring might be like. There are four paths, ranging from structured to exploratory, for learning about the battle: map, observers, battlefield walk, and archives and activities. None relies exclusively on language, and each instead provides several means of representing the battle. The

"map" path uses a collage presentation of photographs, historical images, text, and audio to present an overarching narrative of the battle and suggests some of the reasons why the battle was important in the war.

The "observers" path uses physical representations left by the eyewitnesses to convey details of events from multiple perspectives. At any point it is possible to leave both the map and observers paths in order to browse additional related material and then return to the presentation.

Some people may find the ebb and flow of battle to be incomprehensible without a walk through the landscape to trace out the movements of troops at each site. By means of virtual reality movies, the "battlefield walk" path in *Antietam/Sharpsburg* allows one to "walk" the sites and learn things about the battle that can be understood only by experiencing the landscape. Through photographs assembled as motion sequences, it is possible to feel what it was like to fight in the dense tangle of trees in the North Woods or what it was like to look over the hill at the approaching enemy from the Sunken Road.

Like the other paths, the "archive and activities" path provides different modes of interacting with the material—this time with only one's own direction. There are options to browse the image, text, or reference archives. Here, too, the goal is to help more students know an event in its complexity, in ways that encourage richer mental representations and forms of understanding. For unless students have opportunities to learn in ways compatible with their variety of minds, school will continue to benefit only students who are strong in traditional linguistic and logical ways of thinking.

HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT STUDENTS LEARN?

Students who understand the battle at Sharpsburg should be able to show this understanding in several ways. Some students might use language to argue, question, and make connections to other battles, other units of study, and their own lives. Others might explain the course of the battle and thereby show that they have worked out a narrative story. Students might also display their understandings by means other than words. They might put on a play, make a series of sketches or a short video, compose martial or funereal music, or

portray the battle in signal or Morse code. They could even use several media to publish a page on the World Wide Web.

As more students use virtual environments like CD-ROM, we must be resourceful in providing ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned. We cannot assume that these new media are better—or, for that matter, worse—than more traditional modes. Rather, we must search for direct evidence that students more fully appreciate the need to take into account multiple perspectives, the partially subjective nature of interpretation, and the risks of a simplistic "good/bad" interpretation of complex events. New technologies provide avenues for demonstrating these understandings; but producing assessments that differentiate genuine from surface understanding constitutes a significant challenge.

We also need to think critically about the risks and benefits of products like *Antietam/Sharpsburg*. For example, students might seem engaged but understand little because their response reflects more an attraction to the medium than an understanding of the battle. Interpretation may become overly subjective and relativistic in the absence of canonical text. Additionally, working extensively with one battle requires time, which means sacrificing coverage of other relevant aspects of the war.

On the other hand, such mediated experiences may enable students to engage rich, textured material in ways that give a more rounded understanding. They may also be encouraged to think more creatively and critically by encountering material and mastery that goes beyond summary text. Structures like guided walks can minimize media meanderings or cul-de-sacs. In fact, an experience that encourages understanding in a closed environment like a CD-ROM may ultimately benefit students more than unlimited access to unstructured information on the Internet. The CD-ROM might help students develop a search strategy for the Internet, one based on information needed to further their understanding of some particular aspect of the battle or war. One student might use the American Memory collections at the Library of Congress, for example, to see how Alexander Gardner's photographs of the battlefield at Sharpsburg compared with his earlier work; another might want to read soldiers' letters from the battlefield.

But beyond a specific technology like CD-ROM, we need to think about any technology in relationship to our educational goals. For how we use our technology is but one way students will learn to value deeper forms of understanding and find ways to use their own abilities. For example, how we use an application like *Antietam/Sharpsburg* will depend on whether our goals are to teach historical reasoning, to allow individuals to make sense of original sources, to sensitize students to the radically different perspectives of various observers and various participants, to appreciate analogies for the battle of Antietam (for example, contemporary Bosnian battlefields), or to explore the relationship of traditional historical texts to a television series such as *The Civil War* by Ken Burns and fictional works like *Gone With the Wind*. Unless educators are clear about these goals and their own priorities, the technology will become a tool of obfuscation rather than clarification.

Unlike some spheres of society, few ideas in education are wholly new. There have always been educators who have sought to enhance student understanding, educators who have tried to understand the minds of all of their students, and educators who have exploited the latest technology. By the same token, none of the aims we have outlined depend specifically on CD-ROM technology. The ingenious teacher of times past could make available different perspectives of an event, use various media of representation, and even lead students through a real or imagined trek across the battlefield.

Yet sometimes a series of quantitative differences can yield a qualitative difference. New multimedia work, such as the CD-ROM we have described, may enable ordinary students to gain an understanding that may have been accessible only in the extraordinary classroom in years past. Moreover, the actual procedures used in such a mediated presentation—for example, the guided walk, the ready shift across perspectives—may stimulate the development of new mental representations that can be used in the study of other topics, even when a CD-ROM may not be available.

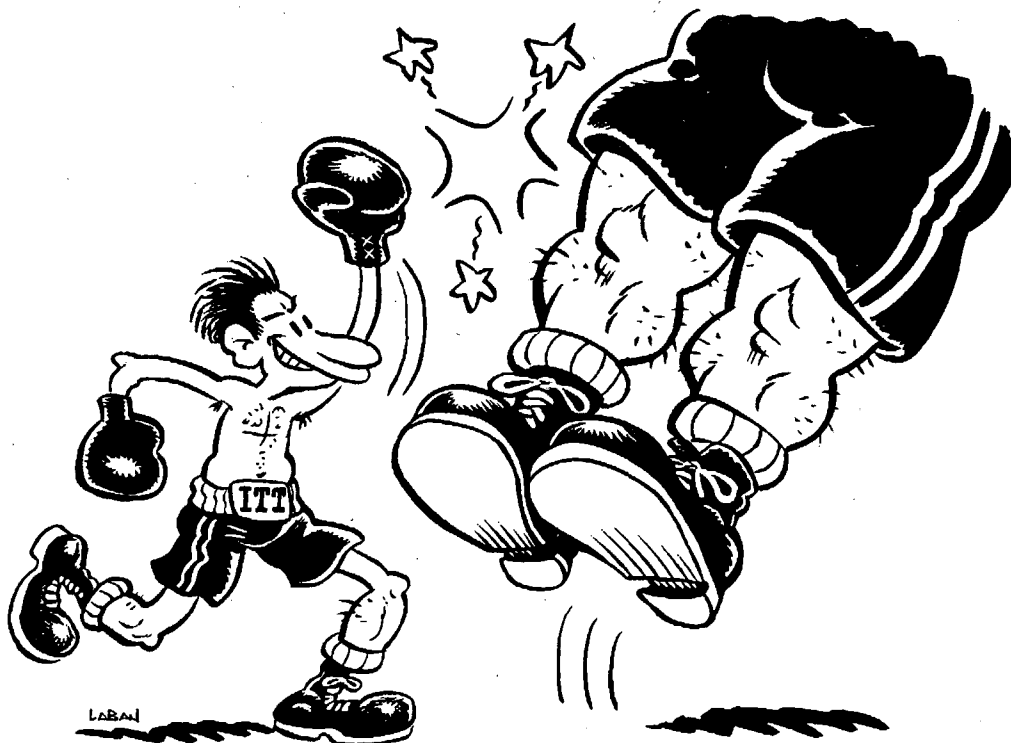
To be sure, the technology in itself cannot spawn a revolution in educational approaches or results. Even as it was possible in earlier days to have a rounded understanding of the Sharpsburg

battle, it would be possible tomorrow to use the CD-ROM to pursue quite banal goals, such as a comparison of the facts that are provided in the different written reports. Here teachers' favored forms of assessment give away the game: It matters enormously whether a well-crafted unit on the battle of Antietam culminates in an objective multiple-choice test, a straightforward request to recite or narrate the principal events of the battle, or the posing of a provocative comparison to be discussed in essay form. It is even possible to fashion more ambitious and adventurous forms of assessment, such as the creation of a multimedia work of art that captures the response to Alexander Gardner's photographs, or a teaching lesson for younger students using *Antietam/Sharpsburg*. These more adventurous forms give maximum opportunities for students to draw on their own distinctive blend of intelligences, thereby both giving them new venues for demonstrating their understandings and broadening the ensemble of possibilities for their peers and their teachers.

Nearly every serious student of contemporary education agrees that we need to make concerted efforts to reach a greater proportion of youngsters with a variety of intellectual strengths and styles, and that the education we offer them should proceed from the mastery of facts to the capacity to understand and interpret. These more ambitious goals do not themselves depend upon the cognitive revolution, but the cognitive revolution has stimulated a better understanding of how students learn as well as the production of more effective educational materials.

European and Asian countries routinely surpass the United States in educational accomplishments, not because their technology is more glitzy, but because the educational enterprise is taken more seriously. Technology in itself cannot alter our scholastic trade deficit. But by reorienting our educational mission and judiciously designing and using technology that meshes with that mission, the United States—and other nations—can achieve far more success with much larger numbers of students. The approach we have described represents one of a growing number of promising innovations that can be readily put into practice and rigorously assessed—and even enjoyed for their intellectual and sensory pleasures.□

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YES, UNION

BY BETH SHULMAN

There is great hand-wringing in the United States about stagnant living standards and rising inequality. But despite this growing concern, too many liberals are reluctant to embrace the best proven agent of greater earnings equality—strong labor unions. Many well-meaning liberals point to global competition as the cause of widening gaps between semiskilled and knowledge workers, creating income disparity and stagnant living standards. According to their formula, education and retraining are the remedy for this increasing inequality.

Yet this solution allows American business to rationalize low wages and widening inequality as merely a necessary response to global competition. The education solution avoids the profoundly political question of how profits from productivity gains should be shared with workers. Here again, unions are a necessary agent of change.

The globalization argument also has the effect of paralyzing workers who are continually bombarded with the message that they are powerless against lower, worldwide labor costs. If they push for higher wages, they lose their jobs. If they do not, they continue to watch their wages stagnate.

This global economy, however, is not the primary culprit of stagnant living standards and rising inequality. It is true that the continued opening of our borders has eliminated jobs and depressed wages of American workers in industries in which the products compete globally, such as textiles, shoes, data input, cars, and steel. Even high-skilled workers, such as computer design engineers, have lost their jobs as new communication technologies bridge the continents. But even in industries competing globally, the global competition rationale for reducing American workers' wages does not stand up to close scrutiny. In many industries, *Business Week* recently reported, Third World per-unit labor costs are close to American levels because of low Third World productivity.

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Yet as devastating as globalization has been in some sectors, these jobs account for only a minority of today's workers. Most jobs today do not compete globally. As seen in recent figures compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, one could conservatively estimate that three-fourths of the private-sector jobs in the United States are not subject to global competition. [See box at right.]

Putting the entire goods manufacturing sector into the global marketplace and adding all of the finance sector still leaves 77.5 percent of the jobs in the U.S. out of the reach of global competition. Not only is this non-global sector of the economy the largest, it is the fastest growing. From 1972 to 1993, service jobs more than doubled in number while manufacturing jobs dropped 10 percent. This growth is projected to continue. Most new jobs today are in the lower-wage service sector—checking out groceries, waiting on tables, servicing office equipment, caring for the sick, and cleaning up for the rest of us. Wal-Mart is the largest creator of jobs in the United States—not Intel, not Boeing, not Microsoft. Between 1987 and 1995, Wal-Mart created a staggering 481,000 jobs; today, it has 622,000 full- and part-time employees.

Ignoring this reality, many liberals have embraced reskilling workers as the sufficient solution to the declining living standards of American workers. The reskilling argument contends that for workers to compete in the global market and increase their incomes, they must be retrained for “high-tech, high-skill” jobs. But there is growing evidence that with the exception of advanced degrees, education does not have the return on investment it historically had. We obviously need improvement in education and skills to prepare workers for jobs in higher-skilled areas. However, the real education gap is at the lowest end of the labor market, requiring the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The declining standard of living for a majority of workers in the United States will not improve by sending workers back for more training. An active and powerful labor movement is the mechanism that can bring workers livable wages, as it did for an earlier generation of workers.

UNIONS AND INCOME DISPARITY

Historically, only a strong labor movement successfully confronted the power of corporations. Mobilized workers, through strong unions, forced business to share their profits with their employees

and, in turn, created a middle class in the United States. Just as in the current low-wage service sector, the manufacturing industries began as low-wage industries. As Alan Brinkley relates in his excellent *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, unionization and worker action created livable incomes and brought millions of workers into the middle class during and after World War II.

At the height of union representation in the mid-1940s, when 40 percent of the private-sector workforce was covered by collective bargaining agree-

JOBS (IN MILLIONS): PRIVATE, NON-FARM PAYROLLS

Mining	.42
Construction	3.99
Manufacturing	12.78
Transportation & Public Utilities	5.18
Wholesale Trade	5.09
Retail Trade	18.23
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	5.04
Services	28.54
Total	79.27

ments, wages rose dramatically; this created the most equal distribution of income in the twentieth century. It was not only unionized employees who were affected by unions, but the entire industrial sector, in which unions had a significant presence. Nonunion employers were forced to push up wages in order to stave off unionization and to compete for workers with higher-wage, unionized employers.

In the 1980s, the government-led assault on unions and the massive restructuring of the economy accelerated the weakening of collective bargaining and the erosion of the middle class. Beginning with the breaking of the air traffic controllers' strike, the Reagan and Bush administrations assaulted worker attempts to organize and diminished the power of unions. Employers understood that America's unreformed labor laws and lax enforcement allowed them to harass or fire employees pursuing union representation. Strident, anti-union campaigns became the order of the day. Employees, in turn, grew to understand that there were no laws to protect their union activity. Today only 11 percent of the private sector is covered by collective bargaining agreements. The result is dev-

astating to workers, union and nonunion alike.

The same confrontation with corporations that occurred historically in the manufacturing sector must occur in today's nonunion service sector if workers' incomes are to improve. Consider one telling example, in health care: Certified by the state for their caregiving skills, 150 nursing home workers are employed in Mobile, Alabama, by Beverly Enterprises, the largest nursing home corporation in the United States. Before they organized, they earned a little over \$5.00 an hour with no employer-paid health or pension benefits.

Beverly did not pay these workers unlivable wages because they lacked skills, or because Beverly is unprofitable or competing internationally. In fact, Beverly made record profits from these workers in 1994, with net income of approximately \$75 million. In the same year, Beverly's CEO made more than \$900,000 in compensation and stock, 90 times more than the Beverly certified-nursing assistant. These Beverly workers first fought for the right to organize and then voted by a two-to-one margin in 1995 to have United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 1657 represent them. After a concerted effort, coordinating with workers from other Beverly nursing homes, they were able to get a \$2-an-hour wage increase and employer-paid individual health insurance. It was only through the power of their union that they were able to achieve these victories. The former plight of the Mobile workers is echoed throughout the heavily nonunion nursing home sector.

History and statistics show that the presence of a labor union can make the difference between a livable wage and an unlivable wage for most Americans. As the Economic Policy Institute reports, unions have their largest effect on the wages of lower-wage workers. Unions raise the wages of their members in the lowest and second-lowest fifths of the income distribution by 27.9 percent and 16.2 percent, respectively. The advantages of unionization are even greater in overall compensation (wages and benefits), with union workers receiving 33.8 percent more than nonunion workers.

Despite tremendous anti-union, anti-worker corporate activities, unions have succeeded in organizing and moving retail food sector workers into the middle class. Today, a Chicago grocery store employee can support her family because she earns \$12.50 an hour with health and pension benefits.

Her counterpart in Kansas City cannot do so because she earns only \$8.00 an hour with no benefits. The only difference between the two employees is that the woman from Kansas City is alone in representing her economic fate while the woman from Chicago is represented by UFCW Local 881. Union critics argue that higher wages drive up the costs to consumers. But the Chicago woman's employer, the Kroger Company, which operates in thirty-two states, is nearly 95 percent union represented and has operating costs in the middle range of the grocery sector.

LIBERALS AND THE U-WORD

If unions are the key instrument to addressing the stagnating incomes of workers, then why aren't more liberals embracing unions? The evolution of liberalism in the last 40 years has created groups of liberals who define their liberalism quite differently from those of the Roosevelt era. New Deal liberals focused on class and economic power, an agenda consistent with and often driven by the labor unions. Taming the excesses of unbridled capitalism and ensuring that economically weaker groups shared in the economic growth were their goals.

However, American liberalism gradually began to change in the 1950s and 1960s. New liberals focused on an individual rights and social freedoms agenda. While the economic agenda of the New Deal had been quite successful in bringing white, male Americans into the economic mainstream, women and people of color were not sharing equally in the benefits of American life. Liberals began refocusing their political agendas to confront rampant race discrimination, eventually challenging discrimination against women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities. These new agendas were exceedingly successful in the 1960s and 1970s giving legal rights and opportunities to previously excluded groups.

Unions, in fairness, had a mixed record in the individual rights and social freedoms fights of the 1960s and 1970s. They played a crucial supporting role in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent civil rights legislation. However, when civil rights groups moved to convert hard-won political rights into corresponding workplace rights some labor unions resisted. A wall began to rise between labor unions and these new rights-focused liberals.

Ironically, this fundamental split emerged just as

liberalism was seeing some of its greatest economic triumphs in the enactment of President Johnson's Great Society programs. But the wall between the new liberals and the labor movement was raised further when the AFL-CIO adopted a strong, pro-Vietnam War position against a younger generation who also identified with a liberalism focused on social and individual rights. The staunch Cold War stance of unionists continued to alienate liberals during the ensuing decades.

By the 1970s unions were also at odds with environmentalists over job losses. These environmental liberals, like their rights-focused, liberal counterparts, mostly eschewed pocketbook issues. Together, this new generation of antiwar, environmental, women's rights, abortion rights liberals stood culturally opposite an older white-male union leadership. Differences in lifestyle, generation, cultural interests, and class separated these new liberals from the union leaders. This political split was exacerbated throughout the 1970s by a stagnating U.S. economy. During this time, the labor unions' white-male leadership looked to reverse their unions' decreasing economic and political fortunes. While enjoying the voting support of liberals in Congress, unions lacked the political support of the new liberal groups who were not addressing a broader economic agenda. The result was the election of Ronald Reagan and a Congress controlled by a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats.

Liberal groups of every stripe were under political attack in the 1980s, but labor unions bore the brunt of the presidential and congressional assaults. Each liberal group focused on ensuring that their hard-fought victories in civil rights, women's rights, environmental protection, and gay rights were not eroded. Yet this rights-focused, social liberalism neglected the common economic problems facing workers beginning in the 1980s—wage stagnation and income polarization.

It is not surprising that many working Americans did not see either labor unions or liberals as representing their interests. Labor leaders failed to pay attention to the changing workforce, which was younger, more female, less white, and increasingly in the service sector. Liberals often alienated working-class voters, who saw them as focused on political and cultural rights rather than on the pocketbook issues that had traditionally attracted workers to elect liberal Democrats.

The defeat of Democrats at the polls and the perceived lack of new economic ideas to address the needs of U.S. workers led to the formation of two other liberal camps. The first—characterized by the early writings of Robert Reich—were industrial policy liberals who saw the need for a new generation of government programs aimed at stimulating the economy and enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. corporations. Their solutions, with changing emphases over the years, included increased government research and development expenditures, the targeting of key industries for financial and regulatory support, increased worker retraining and public education programs, and strategic trade policy. For the most part, unions were not part of their solutions.

Another group emerging out of the electoral defeats, self-styled “neo-liberals,” would eventually coalesce around the Democratic Leadership Council. These “liberals” defined themselves in opposition to all of the other liberal groups whom they perceived as special interests responsible for the electoral demise of the Democrats. They reserved special animus for labor unions, which they saw as anachronistic, advocating anti-competitive, self-protective programs, and scaring the DLC's business patrons.

NEW LABOR, OLD LIBERALS

Yet in 1996, with virtually all the historical reasons for mutual distrust between liberals and labor unions overtaken by events—the Cold War, the Vietnam War, divisions on women and race—why don't more liberals appreciate unions and work harder on their behalf?

Some liberal politicians avoid visible, public support of strong unions because they think it politically expedient. They may, however, support crucial labor legislation such as increasing the minimum wage and prohibiting striker replacement because they need labor's contributions and grassroots, get-out-the-vote efforts. But too few take the lead in promoting unions as part of a liberal agenda. Even in a recent off-the-record presentation, a senior economic advisor to President Clinton spoke of the problems facing the bottom 60 percent of workers and discussed how to move them back into the middle class, but carefully avoided any mention of stronger unions because it would offend members of the audience who represented business. Vice President Al Gore, asked at last winter's AFL-CIO

convention whether workers should join unions, ducked the question. As union representation has dwindled, liberal politicians may see labor as just another interest group—rather than as a valuable political ally.

Many liberals, while sympathetic to unions, still accept the globalization and reskilling argument. In doing so, they neglect the nearly three-quarters of the workforce who are not affected by global competition, but who are the victims of a shift in bargaining power in favor of management. They do so because they see an economy of what Robert Reich calls “symbolic analysts.” This is the economy in which they work—the world of managers, policymakers, economists, lawyers, and other professionals. In that world, better education and better training leads to upward mobility. For them, economic change has been economic opportunity, not economic despair, and reskilling seems a sufficient solution for less fortunate workers.

It is not surprising that liberals are reluctant to embrace unions. Because of the checkered history of the past 30 years, labor has not been seen as an ally for progressive change. This image of unions as blue-collar, white-male institutions, unsympathetic to the needs of women, people of color, and gays, still lingers—in spite of labor’s more recent history. Over the past decade, unions have supported women’s, civil rights, and gay groups that were advocating such legislation as the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the Americans With Disabilities Act, as well as comparable worth legislation and gay protections.

Today, women, people of color, and a younger generation fill the ranks of the contemporary union movement and its leadership. Women total nearly 40 percent of current union membership and newly organized workers are predominantly people of color and women. Much of the elected leadership at the national and local levels reflects these changes.

Happily, there are signs of constructive change. Recently, a coalition of 24 independent women’s groups took a strong public position before the President’s Commission on the Future for Worker-Management Relations, urging that all barriers hampering workers’ ability to organize unions be eliminated. The coalition testified that the gains in formal legal protections won in the 1960s and 1970s could not produce livable incomes without unions. As stated in their testimony, “Studies unequivocally demonstrate that union membership

or coverage under a collective bargaining agreement—more than any other factor—increases women’s wages and reduces the wage gap, especially for low-income women and women of color.”

TAKING SIDES

Many good liberals with a natural affinity for pocketbook issues found labor’s old guard uninspiring. But now the new leadership of the AFL-CIO has a renewed energy and vision, focusing on the economic plight of all American workers. So liberals will have to face that old question, “Which side are you on?” American workers are seeking solutions to their increasing inability to make a livable wage. If the liberal mainstream cannot provide remedies, workers will look elsewhere for answers. Business interests and the nationalist and religious right will fill the void with their own agendas.

Working people feel a legitimate rage at their inability to earn a livable income for their families. The right will continue to use this rage destructively, pitting whites against blacks, native born against immigrants, the individual against government, and America against the world. Business and right-wing politicians will give answers to the frustrations of American workers for reviving a middle class—answers that liberals will not like. Pat Buchanan’s strong showing in the Republican primaries reveals this threat. It would destroy the hard-fought gains that liberals have won for women, people of color, gays, and other groups facing discrimination. The right will obscure what should be the legitimate focus of employee rage—corporations that refuse to pay workers their fair share of steadily increasing profits.

Liberals of all stripes need to refocus on an economic-justice agenda to address the economic dislocations and falling incomes of a majority of Americans. This economic agenda must include the proven agent of greater earnings equality—a strong labor movement. The liberal, individual rights and social freedom agenda still fails to address these economic problems. Individuals acting alone cannot confront the power of the corporate world: Unions are the means of confronting this power. If liberals do not include labor unions in their vocabulary, business interests and the nationalist and religious right will control the political conversation and liberalism will continue to lose influence. A revived labor-liberal coalition is the only means of recapturing political power and achieving a progressive agenda.□

RICHARD ROTHSTEIN

Conceding Success

Saul Alinsky, Machiavelli of the American left, preached in *Rules for Radicals* that activists must “rub raw the resentments of the people,” awaken dissatisfaction, and “fan latent hostilities.” But they also must show change is possible, that “a concrete way of doing it has already proven its effectiveness.” Without pride in prior victories, Alinsky insisted, people rarely have the self-confidence to tackle bigger problems. With hostilities fanned without memories of successful reforms, rhetoric escalates to exclude action and reformers become irrelevant.

Alinsky expected community fights for easily winnable reforms (like demanding regular trash pickups) to build popular confidence and lead inexorably to ending war and poverty. But Alinsky’s disciples became so obsessed with small successes, they lost the ability to fan bigger hostilities. Today’s progressives, on the other hand, may make an opposite blunder: Focused so exclusively on the severity of our problems, we give Americans little pride in past victories and thus little confidence we can achieve new ones.

Americans are now broadly skeptical about the efficacy of government action. A mean-spirited welfare reform tore the safety net last summer because most Americans believed antipoverty

programs only made problems worse. While Americans are not so explicitly willing to roll back existing environmental protections, “regulation” itself now has a bad name: New initiatives confront widespread feelings that rules are excessively bureaucratic and destroy jobs. There is substantial momentum behind moves to privatize public education because the schools are perceived failures, with students doing more poorly than before.

Bob Dole may be the most optimistic man in America, but we liberals apparently know better: America is going to hell in a handbasket, which is why voters should trust the left to enact new government programs to fix things. But most of life’s glasses are half-full as well as half-empty. Many problems remain unaddressed, but public programs—the fruits of liberal advocacy—have also made this country, and the world, a better place. Might not liberals be more successful if we spent more time bragging about what a good job’s been done, and less complaining about how much is left to do?

Gregg Easterbrook thinks so. Easterbrook calls himself an environmentalist, but his book *A Moment on the Earth* enraged environmental advocacy groups when it was published last year because of his charge that they sacrifice credibility by

downplaying environmental progress of the last quarter century, accomplished through government regulation.

The air now has less smog (Los Angeles had 148 air-quality warning days in 1988, and only 42 in 1992); water is cleaner (even Boston Harbor now offers safe fishing and swimming); acid rain has been reduced (the Clean Air Act cut sulfur emissions permanently in half); species have been protected (banning the pesticide DDT meant the bald eagle is no longer “endangered,” while falcons now live on Manhattan skyscrapers and hunt pigeons in Central Park); forest land has been reclaimed (the U.S. now has 728 million forest acres, up from 600 million in 1920); chlorofluorocarbons have been banned (the United Nation’s ozone panel predicts the stratosphere will return to normal by the year 2040). These happened only because environmentalists won campaigns for government regulation.

Yet, as Easterbrook claims, many environmentalists take no credit for these remarkable, even revolutionary successes. Instead, the most vocal groups only attack government because pollution standards are too weak, regulators compromise with industry, development continues to threaten species, pesticide phaseouts aren’t quick enough, and so on. The result is a dwindling constituency for new environmental regulation; it’s understandably

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difficult to win support for regulatory agencies when their own backers speak only of how compromised they are.

Easterbrook also criticizes a related sin, exaggeration of ecological dangers to scare the public into supporting regulation. There is little dispute concerning many of his examples—alar on apples turned out to be harmless; the dioxin-inspired 1983 evacuation of Times Beach, Missouri, was a needless overreaction; exorbitantly expensive removals of asbestos from schools have stirred more fibers into the air than leaving the asbestos sealed in walls would have done. Others of his claims, more controversial, inspired bitter attacks; the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) issued a 52-page critique of Easterbrook's "extreme naiveté concerning the workings of physical processes and natural ecosystems."

No layperson can resolve these disputes about Easterbrook's scientific accuracy: Easterbrook said that environmentalists overstate the danger of northwest logging to spotted owls because spotted owls still flourish in California; EDF said the California owls are a different subspecies. Easterbrook said that expanding glaciers in Greenland suggest global warming may not be as certain as environmentalists project; EDF said the "dynamic role of the oceans" suppresses North Atlantic warming.

But whether Easterbrook was right or wrong about some scientific details, it would be foolish to lose sight of his political argument: Environmentalism is suicidal when it fails to promote its own successes. The public is not too simpleminded to support

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regulation without pressure of exaggerated doomsday warnings. He called on environmentalist organizations to abandon negativism and cranky complaints in favor of optimism and pride in the better world liberal initiatives have created. "On environmental affairs," Easterbrook concluded, "public investments yield significant benefits within the lifetimes of the people who make the investment. The first round of environmental investments did not fail; they worked, which is a great reason to have more."

Easterbrook's editor should have cut at least half the book; after its persuasive "ecorealism," the book degenerates into idiosyncratic New Age nature worship. At 700 pages, it's much too long to win the readership it deserves. But Easterbrook himself illustrates how perverse liberal ideology can become. He lauds the "extraordinary success of modern environmental protection" as "the best instance of government-led social progress in our age," and contrasts this with "vexing policy

areas" like public education, where he finds it "difficult to imagine where solutions reside."

But like most Americans, Easterbrook was unaware that liberals' promotion of more school funding has meant that school outcomes have, since the mid-1970s, pretty consistently climbed. An emphasis on compensatory education and similar reforms has caused test scores and educational attainment for minority students especially to jump. Environmental "revisionism" finds a parallel in educational revisionism as well.

In professional education journals, Gerald Bracey, a former school district and National Education Association (NEA) official, has almost single-handedly been beating this revisionist drum for a decade. He has noted a rise in test scores of all kinds (including the Scholastic Aptitude Test, whose nominal fall he correctly attributes to an expansion of the pool of test takers, as a larger proportion of the high school graduating class aspires to attend colleges that require the SAT), and he's called attention to the unreliability of data used to make unfavorable international comparisons of American student achievement.

For example, liberal critics of American education (like Albert Shanker, in his weekly columns that run as paid advertisements in the *New Republic* and *New York Times*) often cite studies by Michigan sociologists Harold Stevenson and James Stigler showing that American students achieve less than Japanese or Chinese counterparts. Bracey noticed, however, that student samples for these data were

unrepresentative of their respective nations. Students surveyed in Chicago, for example, were 39 percent minority (and 20 percent didn't speak English at home), while a Chinese comparison group had parents with average educations of 11 years—this in the 1980s in a nation whose goal is to universalize ninth-grade education by the year 2000. Bracey also claims that unfavorable comparisons of American students may be attributable to this nation's greater demographic variability. While U.S. students score low on international math tests, for example, students from economically advantaged urban areas score at the top with Taiwan and Korea, while students from Mississippi rank at the bottom with Jordan. Without disaggregating the Taiwanese or Korean samples into sub-populations, we can't know how important this insight might be, but it certainly cautions against typical conclusions about the inferiority of American schools.

Bracey's prolific defenses of American education are featured in an annual "Bracey Report" in the professional education journal, *Phi Delta Kappan*, and in his recent *Final Exam*, issued by an obscure technical publisher. He deserves wider exposure.

Getting better distribution is a 1995 book by educational psychologists David Berliner and Bruce Biddle. Berliner and Biddle cover much the same "revisionist" ground as Bracey, with better graphs and additional information. They describe, for example, New Zealand psychologist James Flynn's documenta-

tion of an approximate 15-point increase in mean IQ scores in all industrial nations, including the U.S., an increase too great to be attributed to better genetic selection and therefore almost certainly at least partly a product of better schools. They publicize findings that, contrary to popular myth, schools don't produce a workforce with inadequate skills and, on the contrary, that America's educational institutions continue to produce more than enough scientists and engineers (plus many technical workers with associate degrees from junior colleges). Berliner and Biddle summarize research by Princeton economists David Card and Alan Krueger showing that when educational outcomes are measured by subsequent earnings, not test scores, earnings are highest for those who attended schools in states with lower pupil-teacher ratios and better-paid teachers.

But the impact of Berliner and Biddle's book will be limited by its conspiratorial tone—their title, *The Manufactured Crisis*, refers to their reckless proposition that conventional analysis of school failure was consciously cooked up by a cabal of corporate interests, neoconservative ideologues, and Reagan administration officials who, knowing it to be false, created a myth to justify privatizing the schools and denying equal opportunity to minorities. While it's possible such ideological motives were at play, the Berliner-Biddle slant assures that an otherwise excellent book is unlikely to influence a broad public. But Berliner and Biddle's documentation of school success is impressive, and it has

done wonders for the morale of professional educators—*The Manufactured Crisis* won “book of the year” honors last April from the American Educational Research Association.

Popular literature providing evidence that schools perform well has previously been available to counter the dominant schools-are-failing view. But before Bracey and Berliner and Biddle, the available literature was anecdotal and ethnographic. Dedicated teachers can be appealing book subjects, and three books in recent years reported classroom observations in the most challenging of circumstances, making impressive indirect cases for public education. Samuel Freedman’s *Small Victories*, Tracy Kidder’s *Among Schoolchildren*, and Mike Rose’s *Possible Lives* amply illustrated the real public school accomplishments that Bracey and Berliner and Biddle report.

Impressive original research relating to school effects is also accessible, though rarely publicized to a popular audience. Two years ago, for example, RAND’s David Grissmer and his colleagues analyzed tests given to adolescents in 1980 and in 1988. Test takers had been surveyed about family income, number of parents at home, number of siblings, and parental education levels, as well as race and ethnicity. RAND was able to confirm what researchers have known for 25 years: Students from poorer families, or whose parents were less educated, scored lower than students who came from more fortunate backgrounds; students’ social

and economic characteristics predict academic success more accurately than other factors do.

But then Grissmer did something quite creative by taking into account the great changes in students’ family situations since 1970. Utilizing known relationships between scores and student backgrounds, he examined the National Assessment of Educational Progress (our only nationally representative student test) and calculated what NAEP scores would have been if students who took it in 1970 had family characteristics of 1990 students. There were two surprising results.

First, most people would expect this exercise to provide excuses for lagging school performance. After all, today there’s apparently more poverty and more single-parent families. But Grissmer found that when he pretended 1970 students had 1990 characteristics, their scores jumped. In other words, when he “predicted” 1990 scores from their scores in 1970, he found that they had risen because parental education levels increased in the last generation and family size decreased. (In 1970, for example, 36 percent of all black adults had completed high school; by 1990, it was up to 69 percent.) This makes some sense: More parental education means children get more academic support at home; smaller family size means they get more parental attention. These factors, which produce higher scores, improved more than enough to cancel negative influences of greater measured poverty. So changing family characteristics should have produced higher scores in 1990, without schools having to do anything different.

The real surprise, however, came next: Grissmer looked at actual 1990 NAEP scores, to determine what part of the change from 1970 to 1990 was due to changes in students’ family characteristics and what part was due to other factors—like changes in school effectiveness. He discovered that, again contrary to common belief, test scores for white students rose in this 20-year period just as his demographic theory predicted they should. More important, however, he found that black students’ reading and math scores improved by more than twice what demographic factors can explain. For all minority students, math test scores jumped 3 times as much as demographic changes alone lead us to expect—a rather impressive jump.

In the last generation, funding for compensatory and bilingual education programs has grown faster than funding for regular education. Could this have caused the results RAND documented? We can’t know for sure, though it’s a fair guess. If so, it’s a good reason to argue for further expansion of these programs to raise scores even more—a better reason than sky-is-falling hand-wringing about school failures.

Liberal revisionism in environmental and educational advocacy, with pride in what’s been accomplished, has parallels in social welfare research as well. Christopher Jencks and Susan Mayer, among others, have for a decade written academic papers and op-ed articles claiming that the War on Poverty was more successful than we’re wont to credit: Poverty,

they say, is not increasing in America, even for children. This iconoclastic view is feared by welfare advocates, because it could lead to the conclusion that we don't need to address the poverty that remains. But the accepted notion that poverty is intensifying has reinforced Charles Murray's conservative claim that all attempts to address it have not only failed, but also exacerbated deprivation and dependency. When there came an opportunity to reform welfare last summer, existing programs had few defenders on left or right. Most accepted that the welfare system had made things worse.

But maybe it hadn't. The conventional view is that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has created a culture of dependency in which more single mothers don't work and thus more children suffer. Liberals generally consider this a good reason to increase the safety net (more child care, food stamps, and public service jobs) while conservatives see confirmation of the corruption of the entire system. But in a new academic paper, Jencks and Mayer assert that the widely reported increase in child poverty from 1970 to 1990 is based on statistical errors and (they wouldn't use this word) stacked assumptions. For example, Census poverty data count only incomes of related family members, not households; so an unmarried couple's children are counted as poor based on the mother's income alone, though the father's (or mother's companion's) income may contribute to the household's standard of living. Changes in family relationships make this

an increasingly significant factor. Also, such public benefits as Medicaid, food stamps, and rent subsidies have improved children's well-being, though the substantial monetary value of these benefits is not counted as "income" in computing alleged increases in poverty. "Using assumptions at least as plausible as those embodied in the official poverty measure," Jencks and Mayer conclude, "we can show that child poverty declined by 5 points between 1969 and 1989 rather than rising by 5 points." In a *New York Times* op-ed last year, they noted: "When we look at the overall antipoverty effort, the bottom line looks quite good. Medicaid, food stamps, rent subsidies and SSI all did what they were meant to do. . . . AFDC . . . survived . . . because it was cheaper than any politically acceptable alternative. This is not a record for which liberal politicians need apologize. Nor is it evidence that government spending does not work."

Jacob Weisberg's *In Defense of Government* tries to weave a neoliberal's middle ground between revisionists who argue that public programs have been successful enough to justify reinforcing them and traditional liberals who believe doomsday pronouncements are the best means of awakening concern. Weisberg fears that even the limited government activism he advocates won't survive a refusal to give government credit where it's due. He bemoans liberals' failure to brag about some successes — like Medicaid, food stamps, Social Security, and even the generally despised community action

programs of the War on Poverty, which he argues helped to develop a black professional class.

Weisberg partly attributes the low esteem in which even these successful government programs find themselves to "overpromising" results even perfect programs couldn't possibly achieve: When Lyndon Johnson declared an "unconditional war on poverty" to assure every American a decent home (among other benefits), LBJ guaranteed his effort would ultimately be judged a failure—and inspire a counterrevolution—no matter how substantial the results. Or consider the declaration of Senator Edmund Muskie, original sponsor of the Clean Air Act, that his legislation would assure "that all Americans in all parts of the country shall have clean air to breathe" in a few years. "Only against that absolutist standard can our efforts to control air pollution be judged a failure," Weisberg notes: Lowering the bar to increase the likelihood of successful verdicts on government programs is needed before support can be built for future efforts.

But Weisberg accepts conventional critiques of the public sector too easily, establishing his moderate *bona fides* by embracing common antigovernment mantras. He claims "overwhelming evidence" that AFDC traps "an underclass in poverty," where such evidence is more like "underwhelming." He's hung up on the alleged inefficiency of government employees, and so makes an odd argument that breaking public employee unions is a precondition for revived government activism. In fact, while there is considerable room for reform in how public-sector

unions function, there's little evidence that government is less efficient than the private sector. Much of the perceived decline in public-sector efficiency is attributable to the greater labor intensity of the public sector, and thus government's inability to realize the magnitude of productivity improvements that technology brings to manufacturing.

Still, Weisberg's book could help resuscitate enthusiasm for public action. Ironically, so too could some recent works of writers normally thought "conservative." If most liberals are caught in the conundrum of denying glasses are half-full, their counterparts are conservatives who deny they're half-empty, concluding that therefore we've already done enough. But the argument can easily be turned around.

Robert Samuelson, for instance, the *Newsweek* and *Washington Post* columnist, last year published *The Good Life and Its Discontents*, a critique of the "entitlement society" and the notion that appropriate government action could permanently avoid recessions, meet every interest group's ever-increasing goals, and abolish poverty, discrimination, and even disease. His is a call for lowered expectations, balanced budgets, reduced Social Security for the aged, and the need for choices between ever-competing economic priorities. But underlying Samuelson's conclusions is a much more optimistic view of government action than many liberals embrace. It also has more activist implications than Samuelson himself, at his most strident points, can acknowledge.

Much of Samuelson's argu-

ment is irrefutable: "choices force us to select among things that are inconsistent"; we've "not adequately distinguished among problems that are genuinely soluble, those that aren't, and those that aren't worth the effort." But on the way to demolition of liberals' demands for perfection, he's forced to insist that we've solved a lot more problems than perfectionists can admit:

Americans now receive more health care than ever, much of it paid by employer-provided or government health insurance. . . . Americans enjoy cleaner air and water than a few decades ago and safer working conditions. . . . Even the poor generally live better. . . . In the United States today, things are much better than they seem or are routinely portrayed. . . . The outlawing of racial and sexual discrimination has been profoundly liberating. . . .

"Yet we fixate on societal flaws," Samuelson continues.

What has consistently been missing is a sense of proportion. . . . We are ill served by either excessive optimism or excessive pessimism. The first regularly leads us into romantic schemes that are doomed to failure, while the second may condemn us to hopelessness and continued paralysis.

This is no unambiguous conservative tract. Samuelson's premise could more easily support the conclusion that since our record of solving social problems is so good, let's focus on doing more of the same; correction is

needed more in our expectations than in our practice.

We certainly face daunting problems. There is the prospect of environmental catastrophe as the developing world industrializes and First World consumption increases. Inequality is growing in the First and Third Worlds alike, real incomes seem to have stagnated, and for many—perhaps even most—they've declined from postwar peaks. Our public schools fail large numbers of children and don't prepare them for skilled jobs and fulfilling lives.

But we'll never address these problems, much less solve them, if we fail to acknowledge and build on past successes. If, despite 30 years of environmental politics, things only get steadily worse, what hope is there of heading off disaster? If, after pouring more and more money into our public schools, we still can't do any better, why should we believe we can suddenly make a difference? The reality is that we can't, unless the premises are false. They are, and a revisionist interpretation, drawing on both liberal and conservative critics, can help build a foundation for a new progressive activism.

Bob Dole may be right that optimists look to the past. But while he looks with fondness on a time when life was palpably worse for the majority of Americans, progressives should look to the past to gain sustenance from memories of fights well-fought. Sure, we should rub raw resentments about unsolved problems, but not without remembering the skills we've learned from competently fixing many others.□

SCOTT STOSSEL

The Other Edmund Wilson

George Orwell, wrote Edmund Wilson in 1946, "is often inconsistent; his confident predictions often turn out untrue; a student of international socialism, he is at the same time . . . not free from a certain provincialism; and one frequently finds him quite unintelligent about matters that are better understood by less interesting and able critics." If Wilson's commentary on Orwell's shortcomings is, like many of his observations, bold and accurate, it is also a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Indeed, Wilson was often inconsistent, his political diagnoses were frequently off-target, and despite his world traveling and wide reading he always remained a product of his provincial origins. His pre-1940 support for Soviet-style socialism was embarrassingly naive. His theory of history, derived in large part from his reading the French historian Hippolyte Taine's multivolume *History of English Literature* at a very young age, reflected a Spenglerian determinism that has little resonance today. And the curmudgeonly aristocratic pose he adopted late in his career bordered, at times, on the reactionary. Wilson was not, in short, a shrewd political or social analyst.

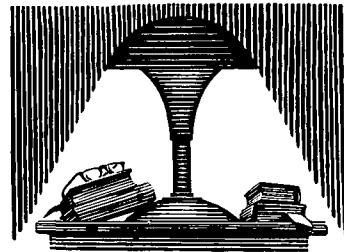
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He was, however, an acute social observer, a brilliant journalist and literary critic descended from the same middle-class liberalism of "common sense and plain speaking" that had, according to Wilson, produced Orwell. Orwell, of course, occupies the more prominent position in the intellectual pantheon. His political reporting was more astute than Wilson's and the dystopian totalitarian visions of his novels *Animal Farm* and *1984* continue to exert a stronger hold on the popular imagination than anything Wilson wrote. If Wilson's literary criticism was in general far superior to Orwell's, his political insights and fiction never quite measured up.

But this has not prevented writers and scholars from trying in recent years to elevate Wilson to what they claim is his rightful status as this century's preeminent American man of letters. Russell Jacoby's 1987 book *The Last Intellectuals* (followed by jeremiads from other quarters) caused a minor stir over the supposed decline of the public intellectual, vaguely defined as the scholar-journalist who could write in an intelligent way about a wide range of subjects for a nonacademic reading public—

the public intellectual being vaguely defined, that is, as Edmund Wilson. In an era of academic overspecialization and a perceived widening gap between intellectuals and the public, a growing legion of scholars and writers began to ask, Where Have You Gone, Edmund Wilson?

But in this orgy of lamentations, something got lost: Wilson himself. He has become so much a symbol to be invoked that what he actually wrote and



thought sometimes gets buried. Liberals, in particular, would do well to unbury it.

But what relevance does the writing of a sometime socialist, sometime aristocrat have in 1996? Why, if so many of his political prognostications and prescriptions were embarrassingly wrongheaded, is he worthy of our attention?

For two reasons. First, despite his sometimes errant political judgment, Wilson's Depression-era reporting, in its indictment of the excesses of untrammelled capitalism, resonates uncannily today. Second, his literary writings go a long way to reconnect-

ing history with literature and literature with life.

AN "INTELLECTUAL CONSCIENCE"

So who was Edmund Wilson? Born in 1895 in Red Bank, New Jersey, Wilson had a genteel northeastern upbringing that included a family vacation home in upstate New York and education at the preppy Hill School and Princeton University. At Princeton he became friends with F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald famously called Wilson his "intellectual conscience," and although Wilson always acted the patronizing superior while Fitzgerald was alive, he did more than anyone to establish Fitzgerald's literary reputation after he died. After graduation from Princeton, Wilson went with the U.S. Army to France, as a stretcher bearer in the medical corps.

Wilson's career began in earnest when World War I ended. In 1920 he started as managing editor at *Vanity Fair*, and his essays began appearing everywhere. In 1925 he became literary editor of the *New Republic*, a position he held for six years, until its owners came to believe he had moved too far to the left. In 1931 he published *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*, the book that firmly established his reputation as a literary critic. That was also the first year he spent traveling around the country, writing the dispatches for *TNR* that would later be collected in his classic work of Depression-era reportage, *The American Jitters*.

The essays in *The American*

Jitters marked the beginning of a decade-long detour for Wilson, away from literary criticism and toward reporting and political and historical writing. In 1935 he visited the Soviet Union and returned still sufficiently enamored of Soviet socialism to publish *Travels in Two Democracies*, in which he tried to equate American political democracy with Russian social democracy. But the Russian show trials of 1937, combined with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, thoroughly disillusioned Wilson and many of his peers on the literary left. By 1940 when he finally published his epic history of socialism, *To the Finland Station*, seven years in the making, he had completely repudiated Russian socialism. But Wilson's intense involvement with socialism was not without some lasting implications for both his politics and his literary criticism.

Wilson rounded out the final 30 years of his consistently productive career in much the way he began it, publishing an assortment of poems, plays, book reviews, essays, a novel, and non-fiction books on an astonishingly wide variety of topics, lecturing at various universities around the country, and contributing regularly to the *New Yorker* from 1943 almost until his death in 1971. Throughout all this, he traveled among empyrean intellectual and political company, influencing a circle of acquaintances that at times included, to name just a few, Vladimir Nabokov, Lionel Trilling, Isaiah Berlin, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Philip Rahv, and John F. Kennedy.

CRITICISM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Wilson is best known for his literary criticism—for good reason. He effectively established the still-dominant terms of critical discourse for a number of writers (Proust, Joyce, John Dos Passos, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and especially Dickens), helped launch the careers and secure the reputations of several others (Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Mary McCarthy), and contributed significantly—though less penetratingly and in less enduring ways—to our understanding of still others (Henry James, George Orwell, T.S. Eliot, Theodore Dreiser, Alexander Pushkin, and many, many others).

His explication of the international Symbolist movement in *Axel's Castle* did much to put the themes and techniques of modernism on the American cultural map and served as kind of a vanguard maneuver of the American radical intelligentsia in hijacking a hitherto right-wing aesthetic and placing it in a left-wing political context. Above all, Wilson's literary writings are notable—and useful—today for the way they link the political and the social to the literary. His writing is not political in the dogmatic way that much ideological criticism is today, reducing literature to mechanical political parts or distending literary works to make a political point. His writing is political, rather, in its presumption that it exists as part of the "public sphere," a kind of cultural town square where literature, public opinion, policy debate, and civic commitment intermingle. Wilson saw culture

as an organic whole, bound up in and inseparable from political and historical circumstances. The job of the literary critic, in this view, is not to subordinate art to political ends but rather to

ernism, for example, or Lenin's position in the socialist tradition, he does so in the way a well-spoken mechanic might explain the spark plug's position in an engine—clearly, plainly, matter-

who would isolate aesthetics in a separate realm, completely sealed off from considerations of politics, history, or economics; and those (like some Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic critics of today, and like his fellow Marxist critics of the 1930s) who, on the other hand, believe art is or should be merely a transparent register of society and politics. Shakespeare's plays, for example, are political creations and there is value in reading them as such; they are more than just transcriptions, however, of Elizabethan imperialism.

LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Wilson dedicated *Axel's Castle* to his Princeton professor Christian Gauss, who gave him a conception "of what literary criticism ought to be—a history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which have shaped them." Wilson believed, with Gauss, that criticism should concern itself with the social conditions that had produced a book or poem. On the other hand, although Wilson practiced versions of what we would today describe as Marxist and Freudian criticism, he clearly saw the dangers inherent in taking these schools of literary analysis to extremes: They become reductionist, making novels into mere catalogs of the artist's neuroses, or registers of class conflict. In the end, Wilson believed, judgment of a literary work must rest on cultivated literary taste. "No matter how thoroughly and searchingly we may have scrutinized works of literature from the historical and biographical point of view," he

Wilson's literary writings go a long way to reconnecting history with literature and literature with life.



Art courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

mediate between a work of art and its audience, placing the work in its literary-intellectual-political-cultural context and exploring its social implications. Literary criticism, he wrote, "should deal expertly with ideas and art, not merely tell us whether the reviewer 'let out a whoop' for the book or threw it out the window." Literary criticism need not discuss social policy; it should, however, provide the hospitable ambient culture in which this discussion can take place.

Wilson offers a model for liberals. For one thing, his writing had none of the consciously opaque technical jargon that characterizes much academic writing in the humanities today. When he explains James Joyce's significance for mod-

of-factly, yet in a way that does not fail to convey the complexity and interrelatedness of the surrounding machinery.

Wilson's literary criticism, situated at what Lionel Trilling called "the bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet," is fundamentally criticism of life. His liberal (and, for a number of years, his socialist) politics figured prominently in his critical writings, but they did so in such a way that rarely distorted the works of art he examined. His criticism aims to study novels and poems as concatenations of politics, psychology, and economics without making novels and poems the handmaidens of these elements. Wilson's example offers a middle way between those (like the New Critics of the 1940s or the art-for-art's-sake types of the turn of the century) on the one hand

wrote in *The Triple Thinkers*, "we must be able to tell good from bad, the first-rate from the second-rate. We shall otherwise not write literary criticism at all, but merely social or political history as reflected in literary texts, or psychological case histories from past eras." In this way, Wilson navigates an intelligent middle way—between the Scylla of political disengagement and the Charybdis of overpoliticization—that today's literary critics might do well to emulate.

Wilson did as much as anyone to introduce modernism to America. He wrote late in life that one of his main concerns had been to be a "cross-fertilizer" between European and American culture, and his grouping of French, American, British, and Irish writers in *Axel's Castle* was part of this project. At a time when America was turning inward, Wilson remained the outward-facing cosmopolitan, looking at literatures on both sides of the Atlantic for comparative historical perspective.

After the crash in 1929, Wilson must have been tempted to retreat into art to escape from the harsh material realities of the Depression. It would have been easy for him to become merely a champion of the modernist aesthetic. But Wilson never saw modernism as a purely aesthetic concept. In fact, the Depression served to focus him even more intently on the connection between literature and political economy. Whereas many modernist critics were essentially conservative, pessimistically seeing

the movement as reflecting the fractured and incoherent nature of reality, Wilson fused his modernism with Marxism. Thus he is able to analyze T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, for example, both in terms of its quintessentially modernist techniques and of the constellation of elements that produced Eliot—the social (Anglican church), political (conservative), economic (upper class), and psychological (a repressed puritan fear of vulgarity).

Wilson's relation to Karl Marx is particularly revealing. In an era of economic collapse, it seemed to make sense that the material base of society would heavily permeate literary projects—clearly, economic conditions influenced art and ideas and vice versa. "Marx showed," Wilson wrote, "how people's theories of society and economics—no matter how well-reasoned or sober—have a way of turning out to be a defense of their class position and financial interests." Wilson was keenly attuned to the correlation between a writer's social class and his artistic vision—as his explanation of Dickens's work, for example, as the product of his traumatic early experiences in a debtor's prison and a blacking factory, clearly illustrates. Yet he was wary of criticism or literature that was strictly ideological. He rejected the classic Marxist idea that the value of a work of art can be judged by the acceptability of its political position. In an essay called "The Literary Class War," he wrote that "a really first-rate book by an agonizing bourgeois may have more human value, more revolutionary power, than second-rate

Marxists who attack it. . . . Personally I can testify that the writer who has made me feel most overwhelmingly that bourgeois society was ripe for burial was none of our American Marxist journalists but Proust"—whom he elsewhere described as perhaps "the last great historian of the loves, the society, the intelligence, the diplomacy, the literature, and the art of the Heartbreak House of capitalist culture."

Wilson didn't just bring Marx to literary criticism; he brought literary criticism to Marx. In *To the Finland Station*, Wilson portrays Marx, Engels, and Lenin as revolutionary heroes who brilliantly combined history, analysis, and a program for social action. Wilson read *Das Kapital*, a work of political economy, as an epic. "It is the power of imagination as well as the cogency of argument which makes *Das Kapital* so compelling," he wrote. He comments on Marx's "keen psychological insight," and calls him "the greatest ironist since Swift." He explains how Marx "gets a certain poetry out of money," presenting us with "a picture of the world in which the commodities command the human beings" and in which mankind is caught helpless in a web of wages and profits and credits. Marx, to Wilson, was the "Poet of Commodities."

FROM LITERATURE TO POLITICS

Wilson clearly absorbed from Marx an understanding of how class and material conditions affect culture, an understanding he applied with vigor to his reporting for the *New Republic*

in the 1930s. If Wilson's social journalism is relevant today, it is because the period in which he wrote it was in some ways strikingly similar to our own. Both periods are characterized by intense economic dislocation, caused in 1929 by total financial collapse, in 1996 by the vagaries of an international economy. (Today's "downsizings" find rough cultural and economic antecedents in the massive layoffs of the 1930s.) Both eras are also characterized by a widening gap between rich and poor. And the economic boom of the Jazz Age 1920s, christened the New Economic Era by boastful Hoover Republicans, has an equivalent in the go-go 1980s, the showpiece decade of boastful Reagan Republicans. But while October 29, 1929, marked a clear dividing line between the Jazz Age and the Depression, our current period has no such line—the ethos of the consumption-crazed eighties has carried over even into the downsized nineties. And if there is a broad connection between the Jazz Age and today, it is that ethos.

Indeed, the last time business values enjoyed such uncritical approbation was before the crash. Describing that period in *The Coming of the New Deal*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., explained that "capitalism had transcended its individualism and materialism, becoming social and spiritual. . . . The new faith permeated the churches, the courts, the colleges, the press." But Wilson had at hand a language with which to combat this aggrandizement of business values. He worked, after all, at the *New Republic*, which had been

founded by Herbert Croly in 1914 in the spirit of Progressivism, a political philosophy that aimed, as Croly explained in his influential book *The Promise of American Life* (1909), to curb the excesses of capitalism with "a more highly socialized democracy." But Wilson declined to deploy Progressivism; he went for a bigger gun.

"It seems to me that the time has come for liberals seriously to reconsider their position," he wrote in an essay called "An Appeal to Progressives" that appeared in the *New Republic* on January 13, 1931. The liberalism represented by Croly's magazine was outdated, he said. Wilson extolled Croly's goal of Hamiltonian centralization for Jeffersonian ends. But he chafed at the limitations of Crolyite Progressivism in combating "a system like ours in which everyone is out for himself and devil take the hindmost, with no common purpose and little common culture to give life stability and sense."

Liberals and progressives—and not just industry captains—Wilson said, were betting on the virtues of capitalism to see the country through the crisis of the Depression. But what does a liberalism that accepts capitalism as presently constituted have to offer beyond "a discreet recommendation of public ownership of water power and certain other public utilities"? Not much, in Wilson's opinion. Such a liberalism, he felt, was ineffectual. What was needed, he suggested in no uncertain terms, was socialism. He called on radicals and progressives who hoped to

accomplish anything valuable to "take communism away from the Communists, and take it without ambiguities, asserting that their ultimate goal is the ownership by the government of the means of production."

Anyone saying this today would not be taken seriously. Socialism has been discredited all over. In 1931, however, Wilson's appeal was fairly standard stuff. The suffusion of capitalist values into all aspects of life during the twenties, followed by the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in August 1927 had, in Wilson's words, "made liberals lose their bearings." Thus the stock market crash and ensuing Depression were "almost like a rending of the earth," ripening it for radical solutions. As he traveled around the country in 1930 and 1931 filing his dispatches, the horrible poverty and suffering he saw—coupled with the stupid indifference of the still-rich industrialists—caused Wilson to move, in Daniel Aaron's characterization, "from pink to red."

From Marx, he had gleaned the idea of writing *as* action, and that's what he believed himself to be doing with his reporting, trying to goad readers into moral indignation and protest. The simple pathos of the descriptions Wilson wrote during this period rivals anything in Dickens or Orwell.

A family of five have three small rooms in a basement, and they have sunk below any standard: the father grinningly and glaringly drunk in the

middle of the morning, the mother stunned and discouraged by her struggle against filth and poverty. They live around the stove with their small dirty children in the close sweetish sickish smell of cooking and boiling clothes. Where they sleep on two narrow cots, the bedclothes are old twisted gray rags that have not even been smoothed out flat. . . . All they know is that they are living in a dirty hole, from which they have not yet been expelled. . . .

[A] widow, who used to do housework and laundry but who was finally left without any work, fed herself and her fourteen-year-old son on garbage. Before she picked up the meat, she would always take off her glasses so that she would not be able to see the maggots; but it sometimes made the boy so sick to look at this offal and smell it that he could not bring himself to eat. He weighed only 82 pounds. ("Hull House in 1932")

Wilson's fervent revolutionary socialism was a product of his times; later, he strongly repudiated it, becoming a social democrat, an ardent anti-Stalinist and a proud, if cranky, patriot. He demurred from his harsh critiques of capitalism, recognizing that capitalism had brought great cultural as well as material benefits. In fact, in a pre-crash review lamenting how the socialist excesses of his friend John Dos Passos distorted his novels, Wilson wrote sagely that "there are moments in reading a novel

or seeing a play by Dos Passos when one finds oneself ready to rush to the defense of even the American bathroom, even the Ford car—which, after all, one begins to reflect, have perhaps done as much to rescue us from helplessness, ignorance and squalor as the prophets of revolution."

But Wilson always remained committed to championing the claims of the dispossessed and he salvaged from his involvement with Marxian socialism some important things. Socialism's noble goals, Wilson thought, should be adopted by liberals. Liberals should be fighting against worker exploitation, class privilege, and economic injustice, but they should be doing so within the context of American democratic institutions.

In *The American Jitters*, for example, Wilson frequently counterposed the mechanical images of capitalism with the flesh-and-blood people who, it seemed to him at the time, had been crushed by it. One of the most effective of these juxtapositions comes in "May First: The Empire State Building; Life on the Passaic River," which appeared originally in the *New Republic* in 1931. Wilson begins by talking about the majesty and beauty of the tallest building in the world, which has been newly dedicated. He lists statistics conveying height, number of stories, elevators, windows, bricks—the figures are impressive. He quotes the lofty comments of the president, the governor, the owner. And then, in a masterpiece of turnabout, he describes this pin-

nacle of capitalist achievement as a triumph of excess: It is the "latest pile of stone, brick, nickel and steel, the latest shell of shafts and compartments that outstacks and outmultiplies them all"—and it is the "most purposeless and superfluous of all."

And from there he goes on to describe Buchanan, a mill town viewable from the top of the building. John Dravic lives in a two-family house in Buchanan. He rents the first floor to Mrs. Berelli, a single mother who works in the mill to support her family. Dravic was going to kick Mrs. Berelli out because she couldn't pay her rent but the city intervened and started paying her relief money. Dravic is a good man. He wouldn't have threatened to put Mrs. Berelli out but he is out of work himself. He was laid off after five years in a car shop and hasn't been able to find steady work to replace it. One night, despairing of ever escaping from his financial straits, Dravic shoots his three children, then kills himself. Mrs. Berelli, who gets to keep the apartment, wonders "how the rich people could do such a thing as let the mill-workers starve."

Dravic's is a tragic story. *The American Jitters* is full of them: suicides, attempted suicides, murders, maggot eating, people down to "their last bag of stale bread, their last heelless pair of shoes," and Detroit assembly-line workers whose arms are severed in the line of work—all of this caused, Wilson implies, by the excesses and indifference of the capitalist system. The effect of reading through all the essays in *Jitters* in sequence is deadening. Wilson's insistence on "the cata-

strophic breakdown of the uncontrolled competitive system" was—understandably, given the circumstances—overdone.

But not entirely unjustified. I have on my desk a pile of newspaper clippings from the last year describing the suicides of downsized or unemployed workers. "A 35-year-old woman who was said to be depressed about her family's financial troubles took her two young sons by the hands and walked with them into the Detroit River, drowning herself and one of the boys," begins a typical Associated Press report. We, perhaps no less than Wilson, inhabit a system in which everyone is out for himself and devil take the hindmost. As business values increasingly are vindicated by the end of the Cold War and our continuing relative prosperi-

ty, the claims of the poor and dispossessed—the moral failures in the eyes of the capitalist system—are pushed further aside. Pure capitalism lacks the vocabulary to contend with the down-and-out because "consumerism," as Robert Kuttner has put it, "quintessentially speaks the language of markets, not the idiom of social solidarity." It used to be that liberals would step in to protect the down-and-out. But as the consumerist din approaches pre-crash levels, liberal voices have gotten softer, not louder.

After completing *To the Finland Station* in 1940, Wilson turned away from political journalism; he now treated politics more obliquely, through a veil of literary criticism. If his legacy to us is

more literary than political, it is not just because that was the area in which he did his best work: It is also because literature was the lens through which he viewed politics—only Wilson could have recognized that Marx's *Das Kapital* and Joyce's *Ulysses* share the same modernist techniques and morality. He was the rare journalist who approached even the most straightforward political reporting assignment as a literary occasion. But he was also the rare critic who could turn a book review into a serious political occasion. We should read Wilson today not only for his acute literary reflections, but also to be chastened by his criticism of the culture of the market—and to draw force from the moral standards for which he once stood. □

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 20

Change occurs *at the margin*, not at the median. External trade may account for only 5 percent of U.S. national income, which suggests that the halving of world trade would cause only a contraction of 2.5 percent of GNP here. This elegant math—dividing 5 by 2—assumes away the linkage between the present and the future, between income and wealth, between trade flows and financial flows.

Just imagine that the people of the United States have zero income

from foreign trade, but hold half their financial assets in the shares of foreign companies, out of which they expect future income. By Krugman's math, there is zero effect on the U.S. economy because of the halving of world trade, because U.S. income cannot be affected. What of the wealth of Americans, who see the value of their paper assets abroad crumbling in a huge market crash? What do their creditors think when they see their collateralized wealth disappear? Put yet another way, what would happen if only 2.5 percent of all the bricks on Manhattan Island were suddenly removed from the buildings?

Krugman's burden is his Ph.D. in economics, from which he can never escape. He had drummed into him the central theorem that human

beings, like hydrogen atoms, can all be smooshed into algebraic equations. Robert Kuttner, by contrast, remains blessed with simple journalistic skills, which have been leading him on a relentless search for the right answers. He can be saved as long as he continues asking questions, or until he runs out of people with answers. Paul Krugman has run out of both answers and questions.

Jude Wanniski
Morristown, New Jersey

Mr. Wanniski is president of
Polyconomics, Inc.

[Editor's Note: Paul Krugman responds to Robert Kuttner's article in this issue's "Controversy," which appears on page 13.]

PREDATORY POLICY

To the Editors:

David Kusnet ["Below the Beltway," July-August 1996] cites with approval the work of Kathleen Sylvester of the Progressive Policy Institute, work that seems to suggest that a significant part of the teenage pregnancy problem can be explained by older "male predators" who are taking advantage of young women. While there is something intuitively attractive—especially in the current political climate—about the idea that young women are victims rather than villains, the notion needs to be scrutinized very carefully before receiving the endorsement of *The American Prospect*.

To begin with, the claim that relationships between men in their twenties and teenage women are inherently exploitative seems to be rooted in rather slim empirical evidence. Often the "evidence" is the mere fact of an age differential. However, since American women generally (not just teen mothers) tend to be partnered with men who are on average two to four years older and since—despite our stereotypes of "babies having babies"—two out of three teenage mothers are 18- or 19-year-olds, we should expect to find exactly what Kusnet says we find, namely that, "between three-fifths and two-thirds of all teen mothers had children whose fathers were at least 20 years old."

In fact, in my own conversations with teenage mothers, the young women make the not surprising point (one seemingly shared by all American women) that men a few years older than themselves are more emotionally mature and more financially stable than younger men. We know from other research that most teenage mothers and fathers have been together for a considerable period of time before pregnancy, and we also know that unmarried fathers see

their children, once born, more often than do divorced fathers who have started a new family. This does not add up to a simple story of male victimization of innocent young women.

What is particularly pernicious about the "predatory male" theory is that it overlooks the despair and poverty that we know to be powerful predictors of teenage parenthood—a despair chronicled elsewhere in the same issue. Worse yet, the "remedies" proposed usually come down to prosecuting young men—most of whom are as mired in despair and poverty as their young partners—adding a criminal conviction to the burden that they already carry. And, depending on the jurisdiction and the charge, such young men could very well face a lifetime of being labeled as convicted sex offenders under laws like "Megan's law."

None of this is to deny that sexual predation and sexual exploitation are facts of life for far too many American women of all ages and classes. But as a simple, "quick fix" solution to the complex problem of teenage pregnancy it does not hold up under scrutiny.

So is the concept of the "predatory male" a blend of "useful social policy with smart politics" as Kusnet claims? I think not, unless replacing the demonization of young, poor women with the demonization of young, poor men is considered progress. Intellectually simple concepts such as that of the predatory male as a root cause of teen motherhood—no matter how attractive to conservatives and liberals alike—muddy this issue, not clarify it.

*Kristin Luker
Berkeley, California*

Ms. Luker is a professor of sociology and professor in the jurisprudence and social policy program at the Boalt Hall School of Law.

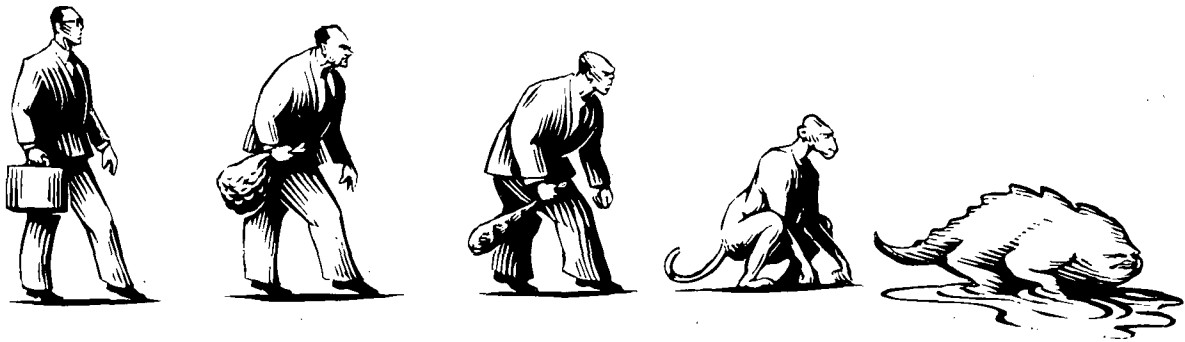
DAVID KUSNET RESPONDS:

Kristin Luker's letter is longer than the several paragraphs in my column that discussed Kathleen Sylvester's research on the problems of single teenage mothers. And Luker persuasively refutes views that aren't advocated either in my brief item or in Sylvester's voluminous work.

To put it mildly, I don't defend—nor does Sylvester's work advocate—"the demonization of young, poor men" or "overlook[ing] the despair and poverty that we know to be powerful predictors of teenage parenthood." In fact, the next item in my column praised the campaign to raise the minimum wage and criticized those who had warned the effort would be bad politics or faulty policy.

As I understand her work, Sylvester is no advocate of simple solutions. But she has performed an important service by publicizing a largely ignored factor in teen pregnancies: Many girls as young as 11 and 12 are being exploited by men a decade or more older. These girls and young women are victims rather than villains in the cycle of poverty and dependency. Sylvester is best known as an advocate of measures such as "second chance homes" that help teen mothers put their lives back together; not as a supporter of the punitive measures that too often pass for "welfare reform."

Nobody's criticizing men in their twenties who marry and have children with women who are a few years younger. But it is wrong for men to impregnate and abandon younger women. This irresponsible behavior should be discouraged, just as public policies should encourage responsible behavior by offering opportunities for education, training, and employment for men and women without work and by lifting wages for the working poor. When it comes to promoting the values of work and family, Luker, Sylvester, and I may be in agreement, after all. □



SENSE AND SENSATIONALISM

Throughout the scandals of recent years, the public has seemed a lot more sober than the reporters. Take the Dick Morris affair. You have to work yourself into a state of extreme delusional rectitude to be shocked by a relationship between a political consultant and a prostitute. Indeed, when I first heard that Morris had been caught with a prostitute, I thought he might just have been by himself.

What was surprising was not Morris's affair, but that it was treated as such a big story, even in the supposedly high-tone press. *Time* magazine put Morris on its cover two weeks in a row; I don't recall any world leader getting such back-to-back treatment. Reporters gave their profound opinion that the latest scandal could only damage the President. In fact, it didn't even cause a blip in the polls. Most people hadn't heard of Morris and, quite sensibly, didn't care. This was not Profumo betraying national security.

Maureen Dowd, who devoted at least two of her columns in the

New York Times to Morris, later wrote that the tabloids had won, "driving the coverage in '96 and dragging the rest of us along on scoops about kinky consultants." Dragged along? Please. The *National Enquirer* should sue her on false charges of journalistic rape.

WHAT PLATFORM? WHAT PARTY?

It was absurd enough when Bob Dole and other Republican leaders claimed at their San Diego convention that they had not bothered to read the party platform that conservatives had written. But Dole has since been outdone by none other than Ralph Nader, presidential candidate of the Green Party.

Nader insists that not only isn't he bound by the Green Party's platform but that he never talks with any of the party's leaders. Apparently, he doesn't want to comply with any of the financial disclosure requirements of the Federal Elections Commission; and if he spends less than \$5,000 on his campaign, he doesn't have to. He campaigns on the cheap; his problem

is the expenses of the Green Party. But, in his lawyerly view, as long as he avoids coordinating his campaign with the Green Party, he need not count the party's expenses toward his total.

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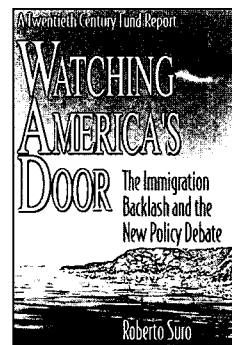
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